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THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

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 **Beware of Wild West imitations of the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are about fictitious characters. The Buffalo Bill weekly is the only weekly containing the adventures of Buffalo Bill, (Col. W. F. Cody), who is known all over the world as the king of scouts.**

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BUFFALO BILL'S FIERY TRAIL;

OR,

HARRY M. LANE.

Lone Bear's Paleface Pard.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

HARRY M. LANE.

CHAPTER I.

CHEYENNE AND DAKOTA.

Of all the fine hunting countries in the old wild Western days there was none finer than Wyoming, which is still, in spite of the progress of civilization, perhaps the best game preserve in the United States.

It was a territory in which the king of the scouts, Buffalo Bill, had often bagged grizzlies, mountain lions, wolves, and other big game, in company with his steadfast friends and brave comrades, Wild Bill Hickok and Little Wharton.

They had, therefore, been willing enough to accept the invitation of their "blood brothers," the Bear Cheyennes, to take part in their fall hunting.

The circumstances under which the three scouts became allied with this Indian tribe and the thrilling adventures which they went through together were fully described in the last story in the Buffalo Bill series, en-

titled "Buffalo Bill's Cheyenne Comrades; or, The Brand of the Death Brotherhood."

It was now the middle of the fall, and the three scouts were sitting around their camp fire on the bank of a small, limpid stream about fifty miles from the Montana border, in the heart of the finest hunting country in all Wyoming.

They had finished an enjoyable dinner of deer meat and coffee, and were lying at full length on the grass, talking over the adventures they had encountered together and speculating as to what luck had attended the hunting of their Cheyenne comrades.

Two days before, they had left the redskins in order to take a little hunting trip on their own account.

That it had been successful was proved by the numerous pelts that were strewn upon the grass, drying. Several of these skins were those of the ferocious grizzly and the dangerous mountain lion.

A single glance at the three men would have been

enough to show that such success as they had met with was not unusual with them. They were all men who were accustomed to conquer their foes, whether those foes were the wild beasts of the prairie and forest, or the nobler game—man.

Of the three men, the one who presented the most striking and impressive appearance was tall and handsome, with flowing, black hair, broad, well-set shoulders, a head thrown back fearlessly in the manner of a man used to command, and piercing, fiery eyes that had in them a look of indomitable will and courage.

Even in that territory, which was full at that time of all the bravest and boldest spirits of the Wild West, he was a man who would have attracted much more than a passing glance.

Col. William F. Cody—for the man was that famous frontiersman—was not yet in the zenith of his fame, but his name was known all over the West as that of one of the best shots and most skillful and fearless scouts.

Wild Bill was a man of much the same type as his friend and leader, except that his hair was a light gold, and he was much more reckless in character. He had not the border king's skill as a leader of men, but he yielded to none in courage and resolution.

Nick Wharton, the old trapper, was a great contrast to his two comrades. He looked, as usual, the first cousin to a scarecrow. His hunting jacket was a patchwork of ragged coonskins and rabbit skins sewn carelessly together. Yet he was not a man whom anyone would have felt inclined to laugh at or take liberties with.

There was a merry twinkle in his eye, and his mouth puckered every now and then into humorous lines, as if he was enjoying some quiet joke all to himself. But all the same, there was a look of stern resolution on his face, and lines that showed he had been through many desperate adventures and periled his life again and again.

"Thet mount'in lion you killed this afternoon war an all-fired big 'un, Buffler," said Nick, as he threw a fresh log on the fire, and puffed at his pipe.

"Yes," admitted the border king, looking at the skin, which was stretched out on the ground. "He was pretty nearly as big as that one which got you down in a bear pit and pretty nearly settled you two years ago in Colorado."

"Durned lucky for me you pumped lead into him when you did," Wild Bill remarked. "If you had been a few seconds later I guess I'd have been a gone coon."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said the king of the scouts. "You still had your bowie knife, though he had knocked the rifle out of your hand."

"You know how much good a knife is against an angry mountain lion. I'd have been dead meat sure enough, Buff'ler, if it hadn't been for you."

Before Buffalo Bill could make an answer to this remark, Nick Wharton suddenly extended his arm and

pointed to a couple of small specks far off on the distant plain, away to the south. The prairie was growing dark, for the setting sun had already sunk below the western horizon.

The three scouts stared intently at the specks, for in those wild days, when the various Indian tribes were still unsubdued, and bandits were numerous all over the West, any approaching stranger might be a possible foe.

The specks were very indistinct, and for some moments nothing could be made of them. Then Wild Bill said:

"I guess you've got the best eyes, Cody. Can you make out what the trouble is?"

"It looks as if there is one man riding ahead for all he's worth, and several others are piling after him in a bunch. There's an almighty lot of dust. I guess some poor devil is being chased.

"I wonder who the pursuers are?—Indians, I suppose. Well, we'll stand ready to take a hand. Jumping coyotes! how they are traveling! I can't make them out clearly because of the dust. The plain is pretty dry."

"Shall we ride out and meet them?" asked Wild Bill, looking toward the horses, which were hobbled near by.

Buffalo Bill hesitated, and looked even more intently at the rapidly approaching specks.

"No, I don't think so," he said, at length. "They are coming straight toward us—or pretty nearly so. The man in front has a good lead and is keeping it. There are quite a bunch of fellows in the pursuing party. They look like redskins, and they might be too many for us out in the open. We had better arrange a little surprise for them as they pass by us. Quick! Let's take cover in the timber."

The king of the scouts picked up his gun, hurried to the horses, untethered them, and led them to a small belt of trees that grew close to the stream beside which they had pitched their camp fire.

The other two scouts followed him, and in a few moments there was no trace of the party in sight, save the still burning fire. Horses and men alike were hidden behind the tree trunks and among the dense brushwood.

By this time pursuers and pursued had come near enough to be plainly visible to the keen eyes of Buffalo Bill. He saw that one Indian was being chased by about a dozen others.

The men behind were so intent on the chase that they seemed not to have noticed the camp fire that was burning in plain view by the side of the stream.

But the fugitive saw it, and changed his course. He would have passed about a quarter of a mile away, but he turned the head of his horse, and came straight toward the camp fire.

This movement confirmed Buffalo Bill's opinion that he was a friend of theirs. He could not yet see the man plainly enough to distinguish his tribal marks, but he

suspected that he was one of the Bear Cheyennes—a brave who had probably been sent to them by Lone Bear, the young chief of the tribe, with a message.

He told his friends in a whisper what he believed, and they gripped their rifles tightly, ready to fire as soon as the pursuers drew within range.

They were all three on the best of terms with the Bear Cheyennes, and had found them true and loyal comrades. They owed them a great debt for saving the life of Buffalo Bill from the desperate brigands known as the Death Brotherhood of Montana, and they were eager to repay that debt.

As the brave who was fleeing came nearer, they could see plainly that he was a Cheyenne, and that he also had his war paint on.

This surprised the scouts, for when they had left Lone Bear's hunting party, only two days before, the tribe had been at peace with all its neighbors.

What could have happened in the meantime?

"I know that fellow!" suddenly exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "He is Red Tomahawk, Lone Bear's most trusted brave. He must have been sent to us with some call for help. The Cheyennes have got into a quarrel with some other tribe hereabouts."

He looked long at the pursuing redskins, who were more than half a mile behind the fugitive.

"They are Dakotas, I believe," he said. "I can't see them very well yet, but they look as if they belonged to that tribe."

Wild Bill whistled under his breath.

"Dakotas, eh?" he muttered. "They're a durned strong tribe. If Lone Bear has managed to get into a quarrel with them, the Bear Cheyennes are likely to have a tough time of it."

"Do yer sagashuate as they air near enough fur a shot, Buff'ler?" asked Nick Wharton.

"Wait a little. Let them get a bit nearer, and then we can fire two or three times at them before they get out of range—if it should be necessary."

The Cheyenne came on straight toward the camp fire without the least hesitation. He seemed to expect that it might be the resting place of those whom he had come to seek.

The Dakotas, however, when they saw the blaze of the fire, seemed alarmed. They evidently suspected that they might be led into an ambush, for they slackened speed, and suddenly reined up their horses and stopped to see what would happen.

The solitary fugitive went past the camp fire at a swift gallop, and cast a disappointed glance at it, as if he was sorry not to find the friends he had expected there.

He saw the traces of recent occupation, even in the brief moment that his horse took to thunder past; but the scouts were so well hidden in the wood that he could not detect their presence.

Buffalo Bill was on the point of giving him some signal that they were there, but he thought better of it, deciding that if the Cheyenne passed by the Dakotas would be lured on.

So it turned out. When they saw that their quarry passed by the fire and sped onward over the prairie, they shook out the reins of their war ponies and came on all the faster for the brief breathing space they had had. They saw the foe escaping them, probably cursed themselves for having halted, and determined that they would have his scalp in spite of it.

In a few minutes they had drawn within close range of the timber in which the three scouts were hidden.

They bore the tribal emblems of the Dakotas, and, like the Cheyenne, they were decorated with the gaudy stripes of their war paint.

"Ready, Buff'ler?" murmured Nick Wharton.

"Yes—let them have it!" replied the border king.

CHAPTER II.

A MESSAGE FROM LONE BEAR.

The crack of the three rifles of the scouts was almost simultaneous.

They were men who were not used to miss their aim, and such close range was the easiest kind of shooting to them.

The pursuing Dakotas were thrown into the wildest confusion by this sudden and unexpected attack.

They had given up the idea that they were being led into a trap, and had concluded that the camp fire had in very truth been deserted.

Now, as they rode boldly on, they were suddenly assailed, and three of the best braves in their party rolled from their saddles and writhed in the agonies of death upon the dry grass of the prairie.

For a few moments the redskins were too confused to know what to do. Then they recovered their nerves and turned the heads of their horses toward the clump of trees from which the flashes of flame that had cost them so dearly had come.

They took the favorite Indian precaution of hanging down behind the flanks of their ponies, as they rode toward the timber in an oblique line, hoping that they would thus obtain some slight protection from the bullets of their hidden enemies.

It was nine against three, but the three had the advantage of good cover and of wonderful skill with the fine repeating rifles which they handled.

The fight was over in a brief space.

Of the nine Indians, only three reached the fringe of the timber. Their ponies were shot down, and as they rushed forward on foot they met the fatal bullets of the scouts.

One brave, penetrating to the edge of the brushwood,

saw Buffalo Bill behind a tree, and blazed away at him with a revolver. He fired three shots, but not one of them took effect, for, like most Indians, he was a bad marksman with the unfamiliar weapons of the palefaces.

As the warrior fired the third shot, Wild Bill brought him to the ground with a well-aimed bullet.

Nick Wharton had meantime accounted for another of the Dakotas, who had rushed in almost to hand-grips with him and tried to brain him with his tomahawk.

There remained but one of the enemy.

He was a tall savage of bold and dignified bearing, who was evidently a chief, judging by the insignia of that rank which he wore.

He carried a gun in his hand, but it was only a common "trade" rifle—not a repeater. He had fired the one shot it contained without hitting his enemy, and now he threw it away in disgust, for he knew it would take too long to reload.

Drawing his tomahawk from his wampum belt, he shrieked the war whoop of his tribe defiantly.

The scouts might have shot him with the greatest of ease, but they were not the men to take a mean advantage of an enemy—even an enemy so fierce and merciless as the Dakota.

Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill both threw down their rifles without a moment's hesitation, and stepped out of the cover they had taken.

They were prepared for a hand-to-hand fight with the Dakota with the cold steel—even though his tomahawk was a far more effective weapon than their knives.

But before they could advance to him, he vaulted on one of the surviving horses, which was standing near by, and rode off in the direction in which he had come with his comrades.

The scouts hastened to their horses and thought for a moment of pursuing him, but when they saw what a big start he had they gave up the idea.

"Let the poor devil go!" said the king of the scouts, looking after the retreating figure. "We've accounted for so many of them that we can afford to let him keep his hair. He can carry the news back to his tribe."

But, in saying this, Buffalo Bill reckoned without the Cheyenne warrior.

When he heard the firing and saw his enemies fall from their ponies, Red Tomahawk had made all possible speed back to the scene of conflict, hoping to get a chance to lift a scalp himself before the little battle was over.

He was almost too late, but when he saw the solitary survivor riding off he shook out the reins and urged his horse to its topmost speed.

As he passed like a flash the spot at which the scouts were standing, he waved his hand to them and saluted them with the ear-splitting war cry of the Bear Cheyennes.

The Dakota chieftain was riding away at a great rate, and the Cheyenne would probably have failed to overtake him, for his horse was fagged with the hard ride it had taken.

But, after he had gone some distance, the Dakota looked around and saw that he was only being followed by one man. Under the circumstances, he scorned to continue his flight, so he reined up his steed and waited for his enemy to approach.

The three scouts, from a distance of about a quarter of a mile, watched the fight, which was one of the prettiest single combats they had ever witnessed.

Both of the braves were experienced warriors, with great reputations among their own people, so that it was a contest of champions. They were expert in all the red-skin tricks of managing a horse and handling their weapons.

The Cheyenne had a rifle in his hand, but when he drew close and saw that his adversary had none, he fired a shot in the air, and then chivalrously threw the weapon away and drew his tomahawk.

The Dakota responded by raising his own weapon and giving him the salute reserved for chiefs. He appreciated the magnanimity of his foe, who had been trained from his youth up in all the better traditions of Indian chivalry.

"They're a couple of fine fellows, aren't they?" said Buffalo Bill to his comrades.

"Sure!" ejaculated old Nick Wharton. "But they'll do thar little best ter lift one another's hair, spite of all thar durned politeness."

He was right. The combat was a fierce one, and the two braves soon showed that they were very well matched.

They approached each other very cautiously, circling round and round on their horses, and hanging down behind their flanks by a foot and a hand. Slowly, as they whirled in circles round one another, they drew nearer and nearer, until not more than twenty or thirty yards divided them.

Peering cautiously over the backs of their horses, they awaited the chance to fling their tomahawks with deadly effect. But they both hesitated to do so, for both knew that a miss would disarm him, save for his knife, and he would be practically at the mercy of his foe.

At last, after what seemed an age to the white men who were watching so eagerly, the Dakota lifted his head well above the back of his horse.

The Cheyenne also showed himself, the moment after, and made a feint of throwing his tomahawk.

The Dakota was deceived. He thought that the weapon had really left the hand of his enemy, but, in reality, it was tied to his wrist by a long cord, and it fell onto the grass about five paces in front of his reined-up horse.

The Dakota thought that, by a lucky fluke, it had slipped from the man's hand.

Yelling with triumph, he flung his own hatchet.

It whizzed with frightful force toward the mark, and had it struck the Cheyenne squarely on the forehead it must have brained him. But it hit him a glancing blow, shearing away one of his plumes, inflicting a slight flesh wound, and stunning him for a moment.

As the Dakota rode forward triumphantly to take his scalp, the Cheyenne recovered himself, regained the seat in the saddle which he had almost lost, and pulled up his tomahawk from the ground with a single quick jerk.

Almost with the same movement he sent it whizzing at the head of the Dakota—now not more than ten yards away.

Straight and true it went to the mark, burying itself deep in the head of the brave.

With a single loud death cry he fell from the saddle and rolled over in the grass.

The Cheyenne dismounted, without a moment's pause, whipped out the knife from his belt, and bent over his fallen enemy to take his scalp.

In doing so he nearly lost his own life.

The Dakota was in the very throes of death, but he had enough life and energy left to hate and to try to slay the object of his hatred.

He already had his knife in his hand, and as the Cheyenne bent over him he made a savage stab upward.

The keen blade entered the shoulder of his enemy, making an ugly wound.

The Cheyenne staggered back, more with surprise than with pain, for he had supposed that his foe was quite dead, seeing that he had cleft his skull.

He recovered himself in a second, stabbed the Dakota again and again and then calmly took his scalp.

He was covered with blood when he remounted his horse, took the steed of his slain enemy by the bridle and rode back to the spot where the three scouts were standing.

His wound pained him, as if thousands of red-hot needles had been driven into his shoulder, but he cared nothing for that.

He had vanquished a great champion of the enemy in a fair hand-to-hand battle, and had taken his scalp.

It would be a great story to tell when he got back to his brother warriors.

Better still—he had done this skillful and valiant deed before the eyes of the three great paleface chiefs who stood so high in the esteem of his tribe. If they would only speak of it to his fellows his reputation would go up a hundred per cent.

Yet, when he came up to the three scouts and greeted them with the grave courtesy habitual to the Indian brave, there was not the slightest trace of boasting or exultation visible in his words or his bearing.

"Greeting to the great chief Long Hair and his brothers!" he said. "Red Tomahawk owes them his life. But for their guns that speak without stopping, he would now be hunting with his fathers in the happy hunting grounds of the Great Spirit."

"You were keeping your end up pretty well, Red Tomahawk," remarked Buffalo Bill, "and I guess you would have got away from them in the end, even if we had not appeared on the scene."

Red Tomahawk shook his head.

He knew very well that his horse was giving out when he came to the belt of timber, and it could not have gone much further at the great speed he was urging it without breaking down.

Buffalo Bill and the others congratulated the Indian on his victory over the Cheyenne. He received their compliments very modestly, praising his dead foe as a great warrior. He was crafty enough to know that that was the best way to enhance the merit of his own exploit.

"But why does Red Tomahawk wear his war paint?" the border king presently asked. "Is there not peace in the lodges of the Bear Cheyennes? Why do the Dakotas seek in this manner to slay him?"

"There is war—red war—between the tribes!" declared the brave, speaking with savage vehemence. "These dogs of Dakotas have treacherously dug up the hatchet which we buried many moons ago with all the solemn ceremonies of the medicine lodge. They are worse than the coyote who prowls at night to find the unburied corpse on the prairie and devour it. They are——"

"We'll agree ter all thet fur the sake o' argyment, Mister Red Tomahawk," interrupted Nick Wharton. "I know the Dakotas ain't exactly what ye might call nice people. But what have they done now thet makes ye so goldurned sore agin' 'em?"

"Done?"—the Cheyenne's eyes flashed fire—"they have raided the lodges of my people while all the braves were away on this hunting trip."

Buffalo Bill whistled slowly.

This was, indeed, startling news.

"Did they do much damage, Red Tomahawk?" he asked. "It's a pity you didn't leave some of the braves behind to act as a guard."

"Lone Bear would have done so, but the tribe was at peace with all people, and he thought there was no need. We never dreamed that the Dakotas would dig up the hatchet in this cowardly way. But only yesterday there came a squaw into a camp, saying that the Dakotas had come down, killed several of the women and old men and burned all the lodges.

"By the blessing of the Great Spirit, they were seen before they could attack, and so most of our people got away in time and hid in the woods until they rode back to their villages."

"Lone Bear will take a heavy vengeance for this!" exclaimed Cody, who knew the nature of his Indian blood brother very well.

"That will he!" echoed Red Tomahawk. "Last night we threw aside our hunting dress, danced the war dance and put on our war paint. Then Lone Bear sent me to find you and ask you to come to the war council and help us with your wisdom.

"I expected to find you further away to the west, but the Great Spirit was surely with me, for he made me fall in with that party of Dakotas, and they drove me straight to your camp by heading me off from the direction in which I wanted to go."

Buffalo Bill drew his two comrades aside and consulted with them for a moment. Then he said:

"We will gladly come along with you, Red Tomahawk, and we will not only aid you at the council, for what our advice is worth, but we will come on the warpath with you and help you to pay the debt you owe to the cowardly Dakotas."

"Long Hair speaks words that are as the music of running water in the ears of his red brother," said Red Tomahawk, gratefully. "But let us start at once. The country is full of the Dakotas. They are as the leaves of the forest for number, and we may not have so much good fortune with the next war party we meet. The sooner we reach the camp of Lone Bear, the better it will be."

Buffalo Bill thought that this was very wise advice. The horses were saddled at once, while Red Tomahawk busied himself in scalping the fallen Dakotas, and a few minutes later the four men were traveling at a good pace in the direction of the war camp of the Bear Cheyennes.

CHAPTER III.

THE WAR COUNCIL OF THE BEAR CHEYENNES.

By the time they started it was quite dark. There was no moon, and the sky was overcast with clouds; but as they were all experienced scouts and thoroughly well acquainted with the country, there was no danger of their missing their way.

For about a couple of hours they rode on without seeing any sign of the enemy.

Then, as they passed by a small clump of timber, very similar to the one in which they had themselves taken cover, they heard, of a sudden, the ear-splitting war cry of the Dakotas.

Half a dozen arrows were discharged at them from the shelter of the trees, but the range was a long one. Except that one of them—a spent shaft—struck the flank of Wild Bill's horse and inflicted a slight wound, they did no damage.

Hickok reined up when he heard his faithful beast whinny with pain. Leveling his rifle, he emptied the magazine, firing quickly at the place whence the arrows had come.

He had to fire at random, but his shots were evidently not altogether without effect; for a loud shriek told of the agony of one redskin at least.

"Let's rush in on 'em, Cody, and finish off the rest!" exclaimed Wild Bill, savagely. "There can't be very many of them, I guess, judging from the number of arrows they fired."

But Buffalo Bill, though every whit as brave as his friend, was not so reckless.

He knew that the help of his friends and himself would be of the greatest value to Lone Bear and his warriors in the hard fight they had to make against the far more numerous Dakotas, and he did not mean that they should throw their lives away recklessly if he could help it.

"Don't be an ass, Bill!" he shouted. "We were under cover not so long ago, and you know what happened to the men who tried to charge us. It might happen to us now. They have a great advantage of position.

"Even if they retreated into the wood we might waste half the night trying to find them, and then not get them in the end. Lone Bear is waiting for us at the camp, and we can't afford to waste time in fights that have no motive."

"Motive! There's motive enough when they stick one of their blamed arrows in my hoss, I reckon!" growled Wild Bill, but he consented to ride on.

They were followed by the taunting yells of the hidden Dakotas, but the latter did not venture out of their cover to pursue them, thereby showing that they were not in strong force.

Probably they had no rifles, as they had fired no shot; and they were afraid of the fine weapons in the hands of the scouts. Their object had been to tempt the passers-by to charge at the timber, when they might easily have picked them off before they could get to close quarters and found out where they were hidden.

As they had failed in this, owing to the prudence of Buffalo Bill, they gave up the fight.

It was near the dawn when Red Tomahawk led the scouts to the war camp of the Cheyennes, which had been pitched in a good position on rising ground, with a broad stream at the back and open country in front. It was a position very difficult to surprise, and its selection showed Lone Bear's good generalship.

Several sentries were posted around, and the little party had to approach very cautiously, for they could not tell the moment when a tomahawk might come whizzing toward them.

The night was still dark, and the sentries, who, of course, were lying down, like all Indian sentries, might not recognize that they were friends until after they had slain them.

Lone Bear would undoubtedly punish the guilty brave very severely, but that would be little satisfaction to them after they were dead.

Suddenly Red Tomahawk gave his tribal war whoop. He had noticed a slight rustle in the grass, about ten paces in front of the feet of his horse, and he knew that it was caused by a brave who was rising to take aim at him with his knife or his tomahawk.

The Indian straightened up, put the tomahawk he held in his hand back in his belt, and greeted the little party.

"Well was it for you, Red Tomahawk, that you called out when you did!" he said. "Another moment and I should have flung my tomahawk at your head."

"That would have mattered not at all, Yellow Wolf," replied Red Tomahawk, banteringly. "When do you ever hit the mark you aim at? There is not a worse shot in the tribe. And as for keeping guard—why, I believe even the paleface soldiers could creep into the camp you watched over."

Yellow Wolf was a good-humored fellow, and he took this biting raillery in good part.

"You are welcome back, Red Tomahawk," he said. "Lone Bear has been like a caged bear, walking to and fro with a black cloud on his brow and waiting for you to return with our white brothers. He will do nothing against the Dakotas until he has the benefit of their wisdom in council."

"Have they not held the council yet?" queried the other brave.

"It sat around the camp fire all the evening," said Yellow Wolf, "and the braves spoke their minds as to what had better be done to repay the Dakotas for their crime. But nothing was decided on. Lone Bear said that we must wait for Long Hair and the other white chiefs."

The scouts understood the Cheyenne language and heard this colloquy between the braves.

"Goldurn my cats, Buff'ler!" exclaimed old Nick Wharton, "they sartinly do expect us to do a hull lot. We'll hev ter make good somehow, or the name o' the palefaces will be mud in the lodges o' the Cheyennes for many a year."

"And it won't be anyways a soft contract, either," answered the border king. "The Dakotas are a powerful tribe, as powerful as the whole of the Cheyenne nation—let alone this one tribe of the Bear Cheyennes. I hope they come out of the business all right, but I must confess that the outlook is a bit gloomy."

As they approached the center of the camp, their old friend, Lone Bear, the brave, young chief of the Bear Cheyennes, came forward and greeted them with much more eagerness than a redskin of his high rank and reputation as a warrior usually allows himself to display even to his dearest friends.

The truth was that the young chieftain was at his wits' end, and he hailed the appearance of Cody with a feeling of the deepest relief.

He had great faith in the wisdom of the border king in all the matters of border warfare, and he felt that he

could show him some way to get the better of the powerful foes who threatened to overwhelm his tribe.

As greetings were being exchanged, his eyes fell upon the gory scalps hanging from the belt of Red Tomahawk, and he asked how they had been taken.

Red Tomahawk briefly told how he had been pursued by the Dakotas, and had escaped through the timely aid of the scouts.

"It is good!" declared Lone Bear, emphatically. "We have won the first fight. It is an omen. But what right have you to wear those scalps, Red Tomahawk, or to hang them to the pole of your wigwam. They were not won by you, but by Long Hair and his friends. No good warrior like you should take any scalp save those of warriors whom his own hand has struck down."

Red Tomahawk looked very much cast down by this rebuke. Without a word he took all the scalps from his belt, except the one he had lifted from the chief he had slain, and offered them to Buffalo Bill.

"Thanks, Red Tomahawk, but I don't care for them," said the border king. "It is not the habit of the palefaces to take scalps."

The brave silently offered the scalps, in turn, to Wild Bill and Nick Wharton; but they both refused to take them.

Then he threw them away, with an exclamation of deep disgust, and not a brave in the camp would pick them up afterward. They remained there on the ground until the camp was struck.

Soon after the scouts had arrived in the camp, Lone Bear called the war council together again.

The tribe of the Bear Cheyennes was not a powerful one, so far as numbers went. Indeed, it was not really a tribe by itself, but only a band that had separated from the great Cheyenne nation, owing to a quarrel, and had placed itself under the leadership of Lone Bear.

The Dakotas, numerous and powerful though they were, would hardly have dared to attack the Cheyenne nation; but they thought they could raid the lodges of this isolated band without the risk of meeting with any serious punishment.

Buffalo Bill guessed that their nation must number at least ten times as many warriors, at the very lowest reckoning, as Lone Bear could put into the field; and this despite the fact that the success of the young Cheyenne chieftain as a tribal leader had attracted many braves to his band since he first split off from his own nation.

When he was asked to give his opinion at the war council, he repeated these facts, and Lone Bear admitted that they were true.

The outlook was very dark for the tribe, and it seemed at first sight that their fight with the Dakotas would be a hopeless one.

"What are we to do?" the young chief asked. "I have ordered the squaws and children, with the old men and

a few of the braves, to seek safety in a secret cave in the mountains. They ought to be there now.

"There is a large store of jerked meat kept there in readiness for a siege. I found the cave some time ago, when I was out hunting, and I thought it would be a good place to make a stand if we ever had to fight against a foe too powerful for us to meet in the open, so I had it made ready.

"We will retreat there if we are beaten, and fight to the death to protect the squaws. But we don't want to skulk in a cave until we are compelled. The Dakotas have slain some of my tribe, and I want to take scalp for scalp without delay."

"I have put the position before you in its worst light, Lone Bear," responded Cody. "They are many, and we are few; but still I don't think the fight is hopeless. We will not go to the cave until we are driven.

"First of all, is there no hope of getting the rest of the Cheyenne tribe to come to your help? If they would take the warpath, the Dakotas would soon be glad to ask for the burying of the hatchet."

"There is no hope," said Lone Bear, with a sigh, and the rest of the braves around the council fire shook their heads. "The faces of our brothers in the Cheyenne nation are turned away from us, and the heart of their great chief White Wolf is sullen with anger when he thinks of me.

"We left the nation because he ruled us as if we were children, and not braves, and he has never forgiven us for that. If it were not that his face would be blackened forever by raising his hand against his own tribesmen, he would have led his warriors against us long ago and taken our scalps.

"What hope is there, then, that he will come to our help, or let any of his braves do so?"

"Nevertheless, you should send to him and let him know how the band is threatened," persisted Cody. "He may not love you, but he must know that if the Dakotas destroy this band, they will be encouraged to attack him and his whole nation, perhaps entering into an alliance with some other tribes for the purpose.

"Besides, when his warriors know that their brothers are in danger, may they not insist that he shall lead them on the warpath?"

"They are all afraid of him—he is a stern and tyrannous chief," responded Lone Bear. "But we will send messengers to him, if my paleface brother wishes. The lodges of the nation are distant only two days' journey.

"Who will go? It is a dangerous mission, for White Wolf swore he would slay any one of us who returned to his tents. He said that when we left the nation, and he is the man to keep such an oath."

The braves around the council fire looked at one another significantly. They knew White Wolf well, and

they agreed with their chief. But they scorned to show the white feather in the face of their white-blood brothers.

With one accord, they all declared that they were willing to make the dangerous journey, if Lone Bear willed it. They all thought the mission was equal to a sentence of death, but not a man faltered or drew back.

The young chief flushed with pleasure beneath his dusky skin when he had this proof of the bravery of his tribesman.

"Lone Bear also is ready to go," he declared.

"You can't," said Buffalo Bill, shortly. "You must stay with the war party. You are its leader."

"I will send no man where I would not go myself. My paleface brother can take command of the braves. They will obey him as readily as they would obey me."

"That may be—but your place is here."

"Let us cast lots who is to go, and leave it to the Great Spirit to decide," suggested Red Tomahawk.

This idea met with the hearty approval of the other braves. Like all Indians, they were inveterate gamblers, and the suggestion appealed to their sporting spirit.

But Buffalo Bill, after whispering for a few moments with his two comrades, Hickok and Wharton, interposed.

"Why should my brothers go to their death when it is needless?" he said. "There are men here who can take the message to White Wolf without danger. I will go, and so will either of my friends."

"Without danger?" Lone Bear laughed sardonically. "My brother does not know White Wolf. He hates the palefaces."

"But the tomahawk is buried, and he will not risk digging it up just for the pleasure of killing me. He knows that the white soldiers would soon descend upon his tribe and destroy it if he did that."

Lone Bear and his braves looked dubious, but the border king was a masterful man. When he made up his mind to do a thing, he invariably did it, however great the opposition.

After a long powwow, he got the Cheyennes to agree reluctantly that one of the three scouts should go.

But it was harder to get Wild Bill and Nick Wharton to agree that he should be that one. They both declared that they would never let him go off on such a dangerous mission alone.

On the other hand, he wanted to leave them behind, to advise and assist Lone Bear in the campaign that might begin at any moment.

Finally, they decided to leave it to chance, as the redskins had proposed doing.

Nick Wharton drew from his pocket a dirty and much-thumbed deck of cards, shuffled them, and laid them on the grass in front of his friends.

"Let's cut for it," he said. "The man who cuts the highest card goes to White Wolf."

They cut in silence, the Indians watching them with

eager faces and bated breath, for they were all firmly convinced that the man who went would never return.

"Ten," said Wild Bill, as he looked at the card he drew.

Nick Wharton had an eight.

"I guess it's me," remarked Hickok.

"No," said Buffalo Bill, displaying a king. "I beat you."

It was an evil omen, for the card was a spade—the suit that is supposed to stand for death, according to the superstitions of gamblers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAUGHTER OF TIGER HEART.

Buffalo Bill was a man who believed in striking while the iron was hot.

Within less than an hour after the council had broken up, he was in the saddle again and on his way to the lodges of the Cheyenne nation over which White Wolf held sway.

He had borrowed a horse from Lone Bear, for his own was tired out by the night's travel; and three of the braves of the tribes accompanied him.

They were to guide him to the hunting camp of the Cheyenne nation, and then conceal themselves near by until they could find out how his mission had progressed.

The four men rode cautiously on their way, dodging two small parties of Dakotas whom they encountered. They had more important work in hand than fighting.

On the morning of the second day after they had left the camp they halted on the edge of a wood.

Pointing over rolling prairie country to a clump of timber about two miles distant, one of the braves said:

"On the other side of the trees, there is a small stream and on the bank of it the lodges of White Wolf and his people are pitched. We will creep toward them under cover of the darkness and see how it has fared with Long Hair, if he still insists on going thither.

"But will not our brother return now with us? It is madness to go on. White Wolf hates the palefaces, and he will surely slay you."

Buffalo Bill laughed lightly at this warning.

He had counted the cost before he embarked on this adventure, and he was not the man to draw back because the peril was great. The Bear Cheyennes had once saved his life from the Death Brotherhood of Montana, and he was glad of the chance to repay the debt.

Waving a cheery farewell to his redskin friends, he cantered toward the little wood behind which the camp of the Cheyenne nation was pitched.

The wood, although small in extent, was very thick and dense, and the border king could see no sign of the camp, even when he had led his horse nearly through the trees.

He was wondering in which direction it lay, when suddenly a young Indian girl arose from the cover of the thick undergrowth almost beneath the feet of his horse and stood motionless for a moment, with a look like that of a startled fawn.

She stared hard at him, and then her look of wonder and fear turned to anger, as he stepped from behind some branches which had hidden his face, and she saw that he was a white man.

"Paleface dog!" she cried, and with a single swift movement she took shelter behind a tree, and fitted an arrow to a small bow which she carried in her hand.

Buffalo Bill was in a tight box. He could have drawn his gun and "got the drop" had she been a man; but he would not threaten a woman, even though she put him in danger of his life.

The Indian girl evidently objected to his presence so near to the tents of her people, and would not hesitate to put an arrow through him if he advanced so much as a step without her leave.

The only thing to be done was to use fair words and try to get into her good graces. This task was the more welcome to the knight of the plains because she was one of the most beautiful Indian maidens he had ever seen.

She was not more than sixteen years of age, but her graceful figure was already rounded into perfect womanhood. Her features were regular and delicate, with beautiful olive coloring, and her skin was not so dark as that of most Indian squaws.

Every movement she made was as free and unrestrained as that of a young deer, and her commanding manner showed that she was of the best birth and breeding among her people.

For fully half a minute Cody looked at her in wonder. She was half concealed by the tree behind which she had taken refuge, and she had her bow drawn back and her arrow pointed straight at his breast. At any moment she might decide to let the cord go and send the deadly missile hurtling at his heart, but yet he could not speak.

Then, at last, when he saw her eyes flash angrily at his continued silence, he called out a greeting in her own Cheyenne tongue, and said that he was a friend seeking the way to the camp of White Wolf.

This did not satisfy the angry little Amazon in the least.

"White Wolf has no friends among the palefaces," she declared, still keeping her arrow pointed at his breast. "White Wolf and his people ask nothing from the white men, save that they keep far away from the hunting grounds of his nation."

"But I have a message to deliver to the great chief which may not be delayed," persisted the king of the scouts. "I must see him and speak with him. It is a matter that concerns his honor and the honor of his tribe."

"The honor of the Cheyennes is not in the keeping of any paleface," said the Indian maiden, proudly. But she nevertheless lowered her bow and yielded to the natural curiosity of her sex sufficiently to ask: "What is your message?"

Buffalo Bill had no particular reason for not telling her, but to tease her for her hostile reception of him, he retorted:

"That is for the chief and his councilors alone. I should not tell it to any squaw whom I chance to meet in the wood. Suffice it that I am a messenger from Lone Bear, the chief of the Bear Cheyennes."

At this statement a remarkable change came over the girl's face.

She threw down her bow and immediately stepped from behind the tree.

Clasping her hands, and bending before him in an attitude of supplication, she begged him, with tears in her eyes, to tell him what the message was before he went on in search of White Wolf.

Here, thought the border king to himself, is something more than mere curiosity.

He looked at the girl intently as she renewed her supplications, and at last he said:

"Tell me why you are so eager to know—what right you have to know—and then perhaps I may be able to tell you."

The young squaw hesitated for a few seconds, and then she threw up her head proudly and answered:

"After all, why should I not? It is nothing to be ashamed of, paleface. Know that I love Lone Bear and he loves me! We would have been married many moons ago, had not my uncle, White Wolf, driven him away from the tents of the Cheyenne nation with his few faithful followers."

"Good Lord!" muttered Buffalo Bill to himself. "Here's a pretty complication! Why didn't Lone Bear tell me something about this? Too shy, I suppose—just like an Indian. Now, I wonder how this is going to affect my mission?"

"And why didn't you go with Lone Bear when he left the nation?" he asked.

A look of grief passed over the face of the girl, as she replied:

"Gladly would I have done so—gladly would I have shared all his hardships and perils; but my mother and my younger sister dwell in the tents of White Wolf, and he would have taken vengeance on them. He said he would do so, and I know he would keep his word in such a matter."

The knight of the plains hesitated no longer, but told her in a few brief sentences all about the treachery of the Dakotas and the great peril to which the Bear Cheyennes were exposed.

When she understood that he was the blood brother

of Lone Bear, the girl's manner toward him changed completely, and she was just as friendly as she had before been hostile.

"White Wolf will do nothing to aid the Bear Cheyennes," she said, after a few moments' earnest thought. "He hates Lone Bear and those who follow him. He would gladly know that all their scalps were hanging in the wigwams of the Dakotas. Not even for the sake of the honor of our nation would he take their part in this quarrel."

"Then, what is to be done?" asked Buffalo Bill, with a sinking at the heart.

If even this girl, who was in love with Lone Bear, echoed what the others had said, the case must indeed be hopeless, he thought to himself.

"There is only one thing we can do," the girl replied. "We must make the nation side with the Bear Cheyennes in spite of White Wolf."

"But can that be done?" said the border king. "I thought that his power was absolute, and that there was nobody in the nation who dared to stand up against him."

"Yes, there is one person—and that person is almost as powerful as White Wolf himself!"

"Who?" asked the king of the scouts, eagerly.

"Myself," said the girl, calmly.

He drew back a step in his astonishment, and his face must have shown the surprise he felt, for the girl went on rapidly:

"Yes, it is true. My father was Tiger Heart, the greatest war chief the Cheyennes ever had. When he died on the warpath four years ago, White Wolf, his younger brother, was chosen chief in his place. But the braves of the nation have never forgotten Tiger Heart, who led them so often to victory; and because I am his eldest daughter they love me and obey me in everything."

"It may be—I cannot tell—that I can persuade them to overrule White Wolf in the council and declare for war with the Dakotas. But it will not be easy. The chief, who is cunning as well as cruel, has stirred up bitter feelings in the nation against the Bear Cheyennes, and the warriors will not at first be eager to help them."

"Then shall I come into the camp at once with you?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"No, that would not do," replied the girl, after a moment's thought. "It will be better for me to go ahead of you. I will speak to two or three of the braves who knew my father best and will prepare them for your message and make them promise to help us. Then you must boldly enter the camp and demand that a council be called at once."

"It will be a dangerous thing to do. You will need all your courage, white man, and if you show the slightest sign of fear you may be cut-down with a tomahawk without the chance of saying a word. When White Wolf

knows what your mission is, he will be eager to slay you."

"Do not fear for me," said Buffalo Bill. "I have been through greater dangers."

"The blood brother of Lone Bear cannot be a coward," said the lovesick girl, confidently. "Farewell! We will meet at the council. But hark! What was that?"

She held up her hand and listened intently for a few seconds.

Then she made a sudden dash into the brushwood a few yards to the right, with a bright-bladed knife gleaming in her hand.

There was a slight scuffling, the sound of two stabs delivered with terrible force, a muffled groan, and then all was still.

A moment later the girl reappeared, her knife and wrist stained with blood.

Her dark face was flushed and her eyes glittered angrily, but she showed no other trace of emotion.

In answer to Buffalo Bill's inquiring look, she said, calmly:

"It was a snake in the grass—a spy of White Wolf's. That was all! They are always dogging me, for he fears that I will try to get him deposed as chief of the tribe. But this one will follow me no more.

"It would have been fatal to let him go, for he must have heard us talking and would have disclosed our plans to White Wolf. So perish all the enemies of Willow Blossom, the daughter of Tiger Heart!"

"You're a bit of a tiger heart yourself, young woman," thought Cody, as she waved him a farewell and disappeared among the trees, after telling him the direction in which the camp lay, and advising him to wait for two or three hours before he followed her.

CHAPTER V.

WHITE WOLF'S FANGS ARE DRAWN.

"Answer instantly, white man, or I will split your skull in twain and give your flesh to the coyotes!"

The speaker was the dreaded chief, White Wolf, and as he said these menacing words he poised his tomahawk above his head and made a motion as if he would fling it at the king of the scouts.

Buffalo Bill had followed his new friend, Willow Blossom, to the camp after waiting the time they had arranged, and he had been immediately taken into the presence of the chief.

White Wolf was a man in the prime of life, with the bold, dignified carriage and athletic figure to be expected in a redskin chief. His haughty bearing was that of one who was accustomed to be instantly obeyed, and the king of the scouts could see at a glance that he would not be an easy man to overcome.

He had demanded at once to know the business of the

white stranger, and Cody had refused to tell it, except in the council of the nation, which he asked the chief to call together immediately.

"I rule the Cheyenne nation, and it is to me that you must tell your message," replied the chief, haughtily.

When Buffalo Bill still refused, White Wolf drew his tomahawk and made the sanguinary threat with which this chapter opens.

The king of the scouts made him no answer in words, but simply looked at him contemptuously, without so much as the flicker of an eyelid.

The eyes of the two men battled for a moment, and then the Indian dropped his, and sulkily lowered his tomahawk and put it back in his belt.

The life of the border king had hung upon a hair, but his fearless attitude had given him the victory—at all events, for the time being.

Without another word, White Wolf turned on his heel and walked away.

Buffalo Bill had not the slightest doubt that he would summon the council promptly, for the chief was manifestly anxious to know the mission on which the white stranger had come.

He had, of course, no idea that it was connected with the Bear Cheyennes; for Buffalo Bill had not mentioned them.

White Wolf naturally supposed that he was a messenger from the dreaded government of the palefaces, whose soldiers had so often beaten his tribe and other neighboring tribes in war.

The king of the scouts strolled through the avenues of lodges, and saw that the camp was a very strong one. It could easily spare enough braves to help the Bear Cheyennes vanquish their treacherous foes. The place simply swarmed with men, women and children.

The squaws and papooses peeped eagerly out of their tents at him, but the braves were too dignified to openly notice his presence, although they were secretly consumed with curiosity about this masterful white man who had browbeaten their chieftain to his face and insisted on speaking in the open councils of the tribe.

Soon the tomtoms and drums sounded to call that council together. Buffalo Bill looked around the camp eagerly, but could see no sign of Willow Blossom, his new girl pard.

While he was still looking for her, but not in a way that would attract attention to him, two braves came up and summoned him to the council.

He bowed his head in agreement, and immediately handed to them the two revolvers in his belt and his bowie knife.

He knew that it was a strict rule among the Cheyennes, as among other Indian tribes, that no man must carry arms to the council fire.

It was a good rule, for the differences of opinion were

apt to be so strong that the weapons would likely be used if they were carried.

Nevertheless, Cody parted with his weapons with a good deal of regret, for he felt that he would be likely to need them before the meeting was over, if Willow Blossom carried out her plan of trying to make the nation declare war against the Dakotas in spite of White Wolf.

When he strode into the center of the ring of warriors and old men who had gathered around the council fire, he looked around the circle, but saw Willow Blossom nowhere. She had promised to meet him at the council, however, and he felt confident that she would yet appear.

There were few faces among the councilors of the tribe that did not frown angrily upon the border king when he faced them boldly and announced that he was the bearer of a message from the Bear Cheyennes.

"And why cannot the Bear Cheyennes speak for themselves?" demanded White Wolf, with a maddening sneer. "Since when have they got the palefaces to run their errands for them?"

"There were many of their braves who were willing to come," said Cody, facing him boldly. "But I, who have been made their blood brother and a chief of their tribe, would not let them do so, for I feared that you would treacherously slay them, even though they came in the sacred character of ambassadors."

White Wolf's face darkened with anger.

He sprang to his feet and put his hand down to his belt, where he usually carried his scalping knife. But it was not there. In common with the rest of the braves, he had left it behind when he came to the council.

"I will kill you for this!" he cried, looking at Cody with murder in his eyes.

"You can try to—when the council is over," replied the border king. "Meanwhile, I claim the sanctity of the council; and if any harm is done to me by treachery before my mission is over, then the face of the Cheyenne nation is blackened forever among the tribes. Is it not so?" he concluded, turning to an old medicine man, who was sitting near by him.

The aged priest made a gesture of assent.

"It is so," he admitted. "The white stranger speaks truth. Blood must not be shed around the council fire, or bitter will be the wrath of the Great Manitou against our nation."

White Wolf glared angrily at this, but he dared not raise any objection, for he knew that all the braves believed exactly what the medicine man had said. He was a tyrannous chief, but he could not go against all the traditions and beliefs of his people.

"Let the white man speak the words of the Bear Cheyennes—and let them be brief," he said.

Buffalo Bill told the story of the attack of the Dakotas on the undefended lodges of his blood brothers.

"They have taken the scalps of your kindred, O braves!" he said. "The blood of the Cheyennes calls aloud for vengeance. The quarrel of the Bear Cheyennes is your quarrel, for are ye not both of one nation? Are not the Dakotas your ancient foes? If they destroy the Bear tribe, it will not be long before they attack the rest of your nation, calling upon other tribes to help them."

The king of the scouts, who was skilled in all the arts of oratory that appeal to the redskin, said much more to the same effect; but he did not make the impression on his hearers that he had hoped.

They listened coldly, for they had made up their minds that they would not be influenced by anything he might say as soon as he mentioned the Bear Cheyennes.

Only the old medicine man and two or three of the younger braves nodded approvingly at some of his arguments.

At last he sat down, feeling that he had lost the day unless Willow Blossom had some card up her sleeve to play.

As soon as they saw he had finished, several of the braves sprang up to answer his speech.

White Wolf rose to his feet and waved the others aside with a commanding gesture.

"Let the chief of the Cheyennes give the insolent paleface his answer," he said, proudly. "It is this, white man. Rather than help the Bear Cheyennes, who have deserted their nation and their totem, we would ally ourselves with the Dakotas and take their scalps."

Several of the braves applauded this speech, but most of them, and especially the older men, looked grave and angry.

White Wolf had gone too far. After all, the Bear Cheyennes were their kinsmen, and to talk of joining the Dakotas against them was a terrible thing, according to Indian ideas of right and honor.

The chief saw the mistake he had made, and he was about to try to smooth it over, when a diversion was created by the sudden appearance of a new figure in the circle around the camp fire.

It was Willow Blossom, but how different she looked from the girl whom Buffalo Bill had surprised in the wood a few hours before!

Then there had been nothing, save her uncommon beauty and the nobility of her carriage, to distinguish her from any one of a thousand Indian girls whom he had seen at various times in the course of his dealings with the redskins.

Now, anyone could tell at a glance that she was a chieftainess—a woman who was used to command and be obeyed without question.

She was dressed in garments of the finest deerskin,

fringed with quills and beadwork, and from her wampum belt there hung at least a score of human scalps—the trophies taken by her famous father in his many campaigns. A fine jaguar skin, which he had been accustomed to wear at war councils and other great occasions, was draped around her shoulders.

In her hand she held a huge tomahawk—Tiger Heart's tomahawk—and as she advanced to the center of the council she swung it in a gleaming circle round her head.

"Who talks of alliance with the Dakotas?" she cried. "Who talks of deserting our brothers, the Cheyennes of the Bear? Here is the tomahawk with which the great Tiger Heart slew the paramount chief of the Dakotas less than five years ago! Here are the scalps of Dakotas—here at my belt! The scalps of the Cheyennes hang in the Dakota wigwams, and there cannot be peace between the tribes. Shall the mountain lion and the prairie dog lie down together?"

"Braves of the Cheyenne! Do you remember the great deeds that our tribe did in the days when Tiger Heart was chief? Then did the Dakotas and all the other tribes tremble before us. What are we now? Only a name, and the shadow of a name.

"What shall we be if we desert our brothers who are in danger? We shall be a thing for all men to mock at. The palefaces and the red men alike will say—and say truly—that the Cheyennes are no longer a nation, but only a village of squaws."

The braves had been so amazed at her sudden appearance, and then spellbound by her impassioned eloquence, that they had not thought of what a gross breach of etiquette it was for a woman to speak in the council at all.

But when she flung out her final insult, White Wolf found his tongue.

"Back to your wigwam, woman!" he thundered. "The council is no place for such as you. Be thankful if I do not flog you until your back is a mass of bruises."

Willow Blossom faced the maddened chief with a smile of calm contempt.

Enraged beyond endurance, he leaped to his feet and rushed at her with outstretched hands, as if he would throttle her.

The girl did not give back a step.

She raised the tomahawk in her hand, and in another moment would have buried it deep in the skull of White Wolf.

Buffalo Bill, however, was too quick for her.

As soon as he divined White Wolf's purpose he leaped forward and struck him a couple of terrible blows with his right and left, felling him to the ground with such fearful force that he lay stunned for two or three minutes.

Then pandemonium broke loose in the council.

If the warriors had not left their weapons behind in

their wigwams, there would undoubtedly have been a bloody conflict.

Buffalo Bill flung himself in front of Willow Blossom and felled a couple of the most ardent supporters of White Wolf, who tried to drag her away.

"To me! To me, all warriors who fought with Tiger Heart!" shrieked the girl at the top of her voice.

That great name still had a wonderful power over the tribe, and White Wolf, now lying stunned on the ground, could do or say nothing to counteract it.

"It is the will of the Great Manitou! Wakantanka himself speaks through her!" yelled the old medicine man who had seemed impressed with Cody's arguments.

"Brothers!" cried an old warrior who had fought side by side with Willow Blossom's father in many a hard-won battle. "Did we not triumph always under Tiger Heart? Let us now follow his daughter to victory."

These two men, and half a dozen others with whom Willow Blossom had spoken before the council met, at once ranged themselves by her side.

The excitement was contagious.

After a moment's hesitation more than half the braves in the council got up and joined them.

The adherents of White Wolf shrieked and cursed in vain. Man after man went over to the party of Willow Blossom and Buffalo Bill.

When the chief recovered from the effect of the terrible blows which the border king had given him, and slowly staggered to his feet, he found that more than two-thirds of the most influential braves and old men had deserted him and declared in favor of an alliance with the Bear Cheyennes.

His rage was fearful to witness. He foamed at the mouth in his fury, but he could do nothing, for he saw that his party was now hopelessly outmatched.

This exhibition of temper did him more harm with his people than anything else could possibly have done. Several of the braves who had stuck by him now went over to the crowd who surrounded Willow Blossom.

They were accustomed to see their chiefs behave with dignity, and therefore they were deeply disgusted by his childish conduct.

"Brothers!" cried the old medicine man. "Shall we have such a man as this to rule over us?"

"No!" cried several of the warriors, in chorus.

"White Wolf, you are deposed from the chieftainship of the Cheyenne nation!" yelled the fearless old priest. "We will have no more of your rule. We will go our own way, and help our brothers, the Bear Cheyennes, if we wish. Speak, braves, and say who shall be our new chief!"

"No chief, but a chieftainess!" cried the old warrior who had fought with Tiger Heart. "Let the daughter of Tiger Heart have sway over the nation. Has she not

more wisdom than the old men, more courage than the stoutest warriors?"

A mighty shout went up from the braves gathered around, and in that moment Willow Blossom was chosen to reign over her people.

White Wolf, his evil face convulsed with rage, tried to speak; but his voice was drowned by the whoops of delight which hailed the new chieftainess.

Gathering around him the few braves who still remained faithful to him, the deposed chief stalked off to his wigwam—to plot and scheme for vengeance and the restoration of his power.

His fangs had been drawn, so it seemed; but his power for mischief was by no means at an end.

CHAPTER VI.

BUFFALO BILL'S KNIFE DUEL.

About a quarter of the tribe elected to stay with White Wolf, and the rest decided that they would follow the fortunes of Willow Blossom and fight the Dakotas.

During the rest of the day the two factions had many quarrels, and blood was nearly spilled on several occasions; but the old medicine man acted the part of peacemaker, telling all the braves that the Great Spirit would frown upon them if they slew men of their own tribe.

It was finally agreed that they should separate in peace and go their own ways.

But if Willow Blossom and Buffalo Bill had guessed the course which White Wolf intended to take, it is doubtful whether they would have let his weaker party get away so easily.

The king of the scouts slept that night in the wigwam of the medicine man, after having seen that the Bear Cheyennes who accompanied him to the neighborhood of the camp had been brought in and welcomed back to the fellowship of the nation they had left.

Early next morning Cody was busy with several of his new friends, making arrangements for striking camp and taking a strong war party to the aid of Lone Bear, when two tall braves came up to him and saluted him ceremoniously.

He recognized them as two of the men who had decided to stick by White Wolf, and he asked them what they wanted.

"These are the words of the chief of the Cheyenne nation —" began one of the men.

"Stop, Big Snake!" cried one of the warriors with Cody. "There is now no chief of the Cheyenne nation. There is a chieftainess, and if you do not pay her proper respect, I will bury my tomahawk in your skull!"

The man who had first spoken smiled a vicious smile, but he took the plain hint, and went on:

"Well, then, these are the words of White Wolf, who

is still my chief, even though others have deserted him. 'Tell the dog of a paleface,' he says——"

At this new insult to Cody, whom they had already come to respect and admire, the warriors started forward angrily and laid their hands on their weapons.

The border king stopped them with a gesture.

"Let him say what he chooses," he said. "He is only repeating what his chief has ordered him to say."

"'Tell the paleface,'" the brave proceeded, "that I will await him at the edge of the wood, near to the northern end of the village, and will fight him there with any weapons he chooses before he leaves with my warriors to join the Bear Cheyennes. If the paleface is not a dog and the son of a dog, he will meet me there. These are the words of White Wolf. What answer am I to carry to him?"

"Tell him that I'll fight him wherever and whenever he likes," said Cody, promptly. "Where is he now?"

"He is already waiting on the edge of the wood. He longs to wipe out the memory of that blow you dealt him yesterday, white man."

"Well, he shall have his chance! Lead the way, and I will follow you."

The brave at once turned on his heel, and the king of the scouts was about to follow him alone. But the warriors with whom he had been talking, immediately insisted on accompanying him. They had no faith in the honor of White Wolf and his followers, and plainly said that the latter would try to stab Cody in the back while he was fighting the chief unless there were people present to see fair play.

As they passed through the village, rumors of the coming duel spread among the people, and a crowd soon gathered and followed them.

By the time he reached the spot where White Wolf was awaiting him, Cody saw that almost the entire population of the village—men, women and children alike—had turned out to witness the fight.

It was not often that they had such an entertainment provided for them. These barbarians were as fond of witnessing deeds of blood as ever were the ancient Romans, and they gathered to witness a duel in the same joyous spirit that the modern Spaniards go to see a bullfight.

The squaws were the most bloodthirsty of all. Cody heard them openly expressing their hope that he would succeed in killing White Wolf. The deposed chief was not popular among the women, who all championed the cause of Willow Blossom.

But most of the braves seemed to think that the border king had a mighty poor chance. They had seen what a mighty fighter he was with his fists, but they knew nothing of his skill with other weapons.

They were not aware that he was the famous Long Hair, whose deeds were already being told round the

camp fires of all the Indian tribes. Buffalo Bill had been careful not to disclose his identity, thinking that it might have prejudiced the cause of the Bear Cheyennes.

He had merely told the council, the night before, that he was a scout who had made blood brotherhood with Long Bear and his people.

This concealment on his part was a good thing for the three Bear Cheyennes who had accompanied him, and who had now hastened to the scene of the fight immediately they heard it was to come off.

They alone knew of the amazing skill of the border king with any weapon he cared to handle, and when the other braves began to bet on White Wolf, they promptly covered all the wagers offered.

Before the fight began, they had staked all they had with them on the success of Buffalo Bill—their horses, their weapons, their wampum belts, even their clothes.

The others jeered at them, and asked them if they did not remember the great skill of White Wolf in handling his weapons.

The Bear Cheyennes did not reply to the jeers. They waited in silence, confident that they would be the ones to laugh last.

White Wolf, stripped to the waist for the fray, did indeed look a most formidable antagonist.

He was over six feet tall, and very sinewy and muscular. A life of hard training and open air exercise had left not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his body.

Every movement he made showed a boundless store of activity and vigor.

His face darkened with vindictive rage when he saw the king of the scouts approach, followed by the mob from the village.

He bent his head in greeting to Cody, and then said, sarcastically:

"The paleface has brought plenty of men along with him to help him in the fight."

The border king flushed with anger.

"Not a man shall interfere in the duel," he declared. "I will make these braves swear not to try to avenge me if I fall, and you must do the same with your followers."

White Wolf agreed, and all the braves took the required oath.

Then the medicine man of the tribe, who had assumed the duty of umpire of the fight, asked Cody to name the weapon he chose.

The knight of the plains replied indifferently that he didn't care. He would leave the choice to White Wolf.

"Do not do so!" whispered one of the Bear Cheyennes to him, eagerly. "Long Hair, there is no man who can equal you in shooting with the rifle and the revolver. Choose one of them for the fight. White Wolf is a great fighter with the knife and the tomahawk."

"Leave our brother alone," said another of the Bear

Cheyennes to his comrades. "He is more than a match for White Wolf with any weapon."

When the deposed chief understood that his chivalrous adversary had left the choice of weapons to him, his savage face shone with delight. He knew that he was not a particularly good shot, and he had been secretly afraid that the paleface would choose firearms.

Now he had little doubt that he would win the fight. There were none of the braves of his nation, save only Lone Bear, who could compare with him in the use of the cold steel, and he thought it in the last degree improbable that a paleface would be able to do so.

"Let us fight with knives," he said, with a savage sneer.

"With pleasure," replied Buffalo Bill.

The braves made a circle, with the women and children behind them, and the duelists stepped into this arena.

White Wolf was naked, save for a short pair of buckskin breeches, and he had oiled his body, so that his enemy would not find it easy to come to hand-grips with him.

Buffalo Bill, on the contrary, did not even trouble to throw off his hunting jacket.

He merely drew his hunting knife, and waited, with his eyes fixed steadily upon those of his adversary.

White Wolf crouched, with his body tense and active as that of a panther.

He hoped to spring in suddenly and put an end to his enemy with one quick stroke, swift as the dart of a serpent's fangs, as he had often done before.

Suddenly the old medicine man gave the war whoop of the tribe—the signal for the fight to commence.

The sound had hardly died upon his lips before White Wolf leaped forward, with a spring like that of a tiger cat, his knife upraised in the air.

But quick as he was, the border king was quicker.

He held his ground until the Indian's knife was within a few inches of his breast.

Then he made a side-step, dodging the rush in the nick of time.

The swiftly-descending knife ripped up the side of his hunting jacket, but did not touch his flesh.

As the redskin went past him, carried forward by the impetus of his rush, he made a quick stab with his own knife and touched him in the shoulder, drawing blood from a long slash.

He might just as easily have stabbed him to the heart, for the brave was completely at his mercy for a moment; but he had no desire to kill him if he could avoid doing so.

Buffalo Bill had been forced by circumstances to slay many men, but he never took a life if he could help it.

White Wolf understood his danger, and he was quick to recover from the impetus of his rush.

As he turned and faced Buffalo Bill again, he adopted

more cautious tactics. He saw that he had held his opponent too cheaply, and that unless he was very careful his life would pay the penalty.

Crouching low, until his body was almost bent double, he slowly circled around the white man, looking for a chance to spring in and catch him off his guard.

But at every point he met the steellike glance of the border king and the remorseless point of the bowie knife, already wet with his blood.

It seemed to the onlookers ages before he could summon up courage to make another attack. The king of the scouts had obviously chosen to take the defensive.

Suddenly White Wolf leaped forward.

Buffalo Bill sprang to meet him, and their two knives met with a grinding clash.

They swayed backward and forward for a few seconds, the knives pressed hard against one another.

Then there was a quick turn of the border king's wrist, and the redskin's weapon was twisted from his hand and sent flying high in the air, over the heads of the crowd.

Thus disarmed, White Wolf sprang a step backward and awaited the death stroke which he knew he would have promptly given in a similar case.

The ring of Indians watched with the keenest excitement, so absorbed that they could not speak.

They expected to see the white man spring forward and stab his opponent to the heart.

But that was not Buffalo Bill's way.

He threw his knife to the ground, crying:

"See, we are equal again, White Wolf! Now, guard yourself!"

Doubling his fists, he rushed at the Indian.

White Wolf had had experience of those fearful blows, and he did not wish to feel them again.

He raised his hands and feebly tried to parry them, but when it came to boxing he was as helpless as a baby.

He was sent reeling to the ground with two frightful blows, one landing on the point of his jaw and the other in the solar plexus.

"Ugh! What mighty blows!" said the old medicine man. "They would fell a buffalo."

White Wolf was in a worse case now than on the previous night.

Blood was flowing freely from his nose and mouth, and several of his teeth had been knocked out by the force of that terrible uppercut.

For a moment, Buffalo Bill was afraid that he had struck too hard and killed him.

He knew something of the usages of the prize ring, and he set to work to restore consciousness, while the Indians stared at him in wonder.

It was beyond their comprehension that a man should take so much pains over his enemy. When they struck,

they struck to kill; and the only attention they would pay to a fallen foe, would be to scalp him.

The border king sent two of the braves for cold water with which he bathed the head and face of the unconscious chieftain.

It was more than a quarter of an hour before White Wolf came to his senses.

When he did, he spurned Cody's well-meant efforts to lessen the pain he was suffering.

Supported by some of his braves, he staggered off to his tepee, first casting at his victorious foe a glance of the deadliest hatred.

Buffalo Bill turned on his heel and came face to face with Willow Blossom.

From an unobtrusive position among the women, she had watched the fight, and now she congratulated the border king on his victory.

"But it was not well done to spare him," she declared. "You should have taken his scalp, white man, when you had the chance."

The knight of the plains told her that it was not the way of the palefaces to slay their helpless enemies.

"It is not a good way," declared the fierce young squaw. "Our people kill their enemies whenever they can. It is wise to do so, for dead men cannot strike again. Mark well my words! We shall have more trouble with White Wolf, and you will rue the day when you did not drive your knife up to the hilt in his false heart."

CHAPTER VII.

WILLOW BLOSSOM MAKES AN OFFER.

Buffalo Bill and Willow Blossom led all the warriors who had sided with them away from the camp of White Wolf later in the day.

The nation had split for the second time, and only a small remnant of the braves, with their squaws and children, remained behind in the old camp.

The king of the scouts feared that the parting might be accompanied by bloodshed, but, thanks to the impression he had made by his victory over White Wolf, it passed off peacefully.

The braves who had decided to stay with the former chief glared sullenly at their old comrades as they rode away, but they did not attempt in any way to stop or punish them. Indeed, their numbers were too small for such an effort, as more than two-thirds of the warriors had decided to accompany the new chieftainess.

White Wolf himself was too sick to be present at the final division of the nation. He was in his tent, groaning with the pain of the fearful thrashing Buffalo Bill had given him.

After they had ridden beyond the limits of the wood and put about a couple of miles between themselves and

the camp, Willow Blossom turned to Buffalo Bill, by whose side she was riding, and said:

"Long Hair"—the Bear Cheyennes, jubilant over the winning of their bets, had by this time disclosed Cody's identity—"my heart misgives me. I fear that that cunning and treacherous man we have left behind will yet do something to work harm to us and Lone Bear. Did you see his face when he was led away after you had given him those terrible blows? It was the face of a man who would stop at nothing in order to be revenged."

"What can he do?" asked Cody. "I think we have drawn his fangs pretty effectually."

"I fear he will march, with all the braves who have remained with him, and join the Dakotas."

"He would not dare!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, his eyes flashing fire.

"There is nothing he would hesitate at in order to be avenged upon us."

"But would the braves follow him against their own kinsmen?"

"Yes. Those who have remained with him would follow him anywhere. They are completely dominated by him."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"I think it would be a good plan to send a few of our warriors back to keep a watch on the camp, without being seen themselves, and to bring us early news of what he does."

Buffalo Bill agreed that the idea was a good one, and four of the braves were called up, carefully instructed in the part they were to play, and sent back to maintain a watch on White Wolf's movements from the safe shelter of the wood.

The camp of Lone Bear was reached without any trouble. One small scouting party of the Dakotas was seen, but it fled at the sight of such a powerful force.

It goes without saying that the chief of the Bear Cheyennes was overjoyed at the great success that had attended Buffalo Bill's mission.

He had not expected to see his blood brother alive again—still less to see him return with the greater part of the Cheyenne nation at his back.

But, more than all else, the young chief was rejoiced to see the girl he loved riding into the camp by the side of Buffalo Bill, and to know that it was mainly to her he owed the strengthening of his little force.

He lost no time in making fresh love to her and pressing her to marry him at once, so that the two branches of the tribe would be more closely bound together.

Willow Blossom loved him very dearly, and would have liked to yield to his appeal. But she was a chieftainess as well as a woman, and the chieftainess conquered.

"I will not marry you, Lone Bear, until after the Dakotas have been completely conquered," she said, "and I

will only marry you then if you have distinguished yourself above all the rest of the warriors in the fight with them."

"That is a hard condition, Willow Blossom," replied the young chief. "Among the Cheyennes there are many brave warriors, and who am I that I should hope to be greater than all?"

"You are the chief, and you must show yourself worthy of the title. I have led my people into this war, in which many of them will be killed. It is my duty to do all I can to secure the triumph of the Cheyennes, without thinking of my own selfish love."

"Let it be known all through the camp that Willow Blossom, the daughter of Tiger Heart and the chieftainess of the Cheyenne nation, will marry the man who fights best against the Cheyennes, if he will take her; and that he shall share with her the ruling over the nation."

Lone Bear was saddened by these words, but he was a man of spirit and he accepted the challenge boldly, when he saw that it was hopeless to seek to turn her from her purpose.

"So be it, Willow Blossom," he said. "I accept the condition, hard though it is, and I will seek to be the man to merit your favor. But I ask one thing only of you. Do not include Long Hair, the paleface chief, in your bargain. Neither I nor any other man in the Cheyenne nation could hope to win greater honor and renown than he will do in this fight. He is a warrior among a million."

"Be it so," said the girl. "I will not take account of him or of the other white men. What you say is true, and, besides"—she added, naïvely—"I do not believe he would take me to wife, even to become the chief over the Cheyenne nation. It is not well for redskin to mate with paleface."

The offer of the chieftainess was speedily noised abroad in the camp, and naturally it created a great deal of excitement and eager anticipation among the warriors.

There was not one of them who did not hope, by some deed of extraordinary valor, to win the hand of Willow Blossom, and with it authority over the tribe.

"Gosh my suspenders!" exclaimed old Nick Wharton to Buffalo Bill, when he heard the news. "I'm durned sorry white men are barred out o' this yer competition. I ain't so young as I was, but I'd like ter have a shot at it myself. She's sech a dainty little critter thet you could forgive her fer bein' a redskin. I guess she's only red on the outside, anyway. Her heart's white enough."

Buffalo Bill laughed.

"Do you really think so, Nick?" he said. "Well, I reckon she's every bit a redskin just as much as her father, Tiger Heart, ever was." And he told the old trapper the story of how Willow Blossom had stabbed the spy to death in the wood.

"Gol-durn me fer an old kafoozler!" said the old man

when he heard this. "Whar wimmen is consarned, you never kin tell, kin ye? Now, I'd hev sworn she was jest as gentle as they make 'em. Waal, some other feller kin be her husband, an' I won't envy him! Old Nick Wharton ain't got no use fer a wife what 'ud go an' interjuce six inches o' cold steel inter his vitals the minute she got a bit jealous."

"You're a wise man, Nick," laughed Cody. "But our friend, Lone Bear, will feel pretty sore if somebody else goes and cuts him out and wins the girl."

"He'll be durned lucky ter be out of it," growled the old trapper.

But with this view Buffalo Bill did not agree, and it was not long before he was able to suggest to his blood brother a way in which he might distinguish himself above all the rest of his nation.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLUMED HERON'S BAD NEWS.

While the border king had been away on his mission to the camp of White Wolf, Lone Bear and his warriors had not much fighting to do.

The Dakotas had reconnoitered their position, and there had been some small skirmishes between scouts and outposts; but the enemy had hesitated to attack such a strong position without first mustering all their available forces, and they had been sending out messengers to remote villages for that purpose.

They had not dreamed the Bear Cheyennes would be reinforced by the nation they had left, for they knew of the feud between them and did not imagine it could be healed.

Now that they saw how their numbers had been increased, the Dakotas withdrew to the mountains fringing their own country and seemed disposed to act on the defensive.

Here it would be dangerous to follow them, for they had many strongholds; but something must be done—for the blood of the Bear Cheyennes who had been slain could not go unavenged.

A grand war council was held two nights after the return of Buffalo Bill, and the plan of campaign was earnestly discussed.

While it was in session, the braves were amazed by the sudden appearance in their midst of Plumed Heron, one of the men whom Willow Blossom had left behind to watch the movements of White Wolf and his followers.

He was exhausted almost to the point of collapse, and had to be supported by two men while he told his story to the council. Blood covered his body, and still oozed from a dozen ghastly wounds. His face was drawn and haggard, as if he had passed through terrible suffering.

"Speak, Plumed Heron!" cried Willow Blossom,

springing to her feet as she saw him. "What is the matter? Where are your comrades?"

"They are dead, Willow Blossom!"

"Dead!"

"Ay, dead!"

"How is this?"

"We watched, as you commanded, and we discovered that White Wolf and his men were preparing to strike the camp and go on a journey. We waited and tracked them when they started, and we saw that their course led them straight to the lodges of the Dakotas. Raging at the defeat he had met with at your hands, White Wolf had determined to join the enemies of his nation.

"As soon as we were sure of this, we turned and hastened back to join you and tell you the news. But White Wolf is more cunning than the prairie fox. He had suspected that you would put men on his track, and he had set some of his braves to watch the watchers.

"They came upon us as we lay around our camp fire at night, and we were made prisoners before we had a chance to resist. We were taken before White Wolf, and when we all refused to join his party and swear that we would no longer serve you, he ordered that we should be tortured to death.

"The order was carried out, although some of his braves protested against it. My comrades are now dead, and as for me—well, I got a chance to break away from them, and took it; but you can see what I went through first.

"I had to cut my way through six of his braves, and they wounded me many times before I could reach a horse and make a dash for the open plain. My comrades were all dead by that time, for I was the last man reserved for the torture."

The brave had scarcely strength to tell this grim story, and as he finished it he fainted dead away.

Buffalo Bill lifted him in his strong arms and carried him outside the circle of the council, delivering him over to the charge of Wild Bill, who speedily brought him round and attended to his wounds.

Willow Blossom had turned as pale as death when she heard the story of Plumed Heron. She felt that she was responsible for the death of her tribesmen. But in a moment the courage natural to a daughter of Tiger Heart came to her aid, and her sorrow turned to a passion of anger.

"Where is the man who will give me revenge on this son of a dog who has tortured his own kinsmen?" she demanded, angrily. "Shall we endure this thing? White Wolf must die! Ah! Long Hair, it had been well if you had slain him when you had the chance! Then this thing would not have happened. The blood of my braves would not have cried aloud for vengeance. But the past is dead. There remains only the future! To the man who slays White Wolf I pledge myself. He will be the

greatest brave in the tribe, for there can be no service greater than his."

Her fiery words made a great impression on the council.

Man after man sprang to his feet and declared that he would seek White Wolf out in the heat of battle and kill him.

Lone Bear sat silent, absorbed in thought.

He was not a man given to loud protestations. He preferred to do things before he spoke of them.

Buffalo Bill watched him narrowly for a few minutes, and then walked over to him and tapped him lightly on the shoulder.

Lone Bear looked round, with a start, and then, seeing who it was, smiled pleasantly.

"Come, my brother," said Buffalo Bill. "I have a word to say to you."

Lone Bear arose immediately and followed him.

Buffalo Bill sat down at a distance of about a hundred yards from the council fire, after making sure that there was no one around to overhear him, and said:

"Lone Bear, do you not want to win the prize and make Willow Blossom your wife?"

Lone Bear did not answer in words, but his fiery dark eyes spoke volumes.

"Well, then," the border king went on, "I have a plan to suggest by which you may do it, provided you are successful. But it is dangerous."

"Lone Bear cares nothing for the danger," said the young chief. "He does not care to live if another brave wins Willow Blossom."

"Listen! This is the plan I have thought of.

"Have you heard of the sacred war drum of the Dakotas? Yes, I see you have. It is their talisman—their mascot. Again and again it has been beaten by their head medicine man before they marched to victory over their foes, and they believe that all their good fortune depends upon keeping it in the possession of the tribe. Is this not so?"

"Ay, it is so," replied the Indian. "It is the common talk among all the tribes."

"Then your course is plain," said the border king. "Make your way by stealth into the camp of the Dakotas and steal the war drum. Bring it back with you to our camp, and you will be acclaimed as the best brave of your nation. The hearts of the Dakotas will turn to water when they know that they have lost this talisman upon which they depend for all their victories, and it will be easy for us to vanquish them, even if they seek the shelter of their mountain strongholds."

The young Cheyenne chieftain was fired by these stirring words, and he instantly replied:

"I will do it, or die in the attempt. Long Hair, you have shown me the way to win Willow Blossom; and I will risk everything in the effort. It may be that I will encounter that villain White Wolf while I am on this

task. If so, I shall have a double chance of winning my bride, for he shall not escape if he comes within reach of my tomahawk."

"Don't think it is going to be too easy, Lone Bear," said Cody, warningly. "Do you know where the medicine men of the Dakotas keep their sacred war drum hidden?"

"No."

"I heard of it from an old Dakota whom I befriended two years ago. I saved his life when he was attacked by a grizzly bear, and he told me many things about his tribe—among the rest, about this sacred war drum."

"But would it be right to use what he told you to injure his own tribe?" asked Lone Bear, who was in all things the soul of honor.

"Yes, there can be no harm. He himself had a bitter grudge against his tribe. They had left him, old and wounded, in the desert to be the prey of wild beasts, because they could not be troubled to carry him along with their hunting party. He would have died but for me.

"He swore that if he lived long enough he would have revenge on the men who had so basely deserted him. Nothing would have pleased him more than that I should use what he told me to harm the tribe.

"He is dead now—he died some months afterward as the result of exposure in his old age, but I can fancy that his spirit would look down from the happy hunting grounds of the Great Manitou and rejoice in the downfall of the Dakota nation which treated him so cruelly."

"Then say on," Lone Bear said. "What did he tell you about this sacred drum, Long Hair?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE WAR DRUM OF THE DAKOTAS.

Buffalo Bill hesitated for a moment, and then said:

"I do not like to tell you the story, Lone Bear, for any attempt to seize the drum will be fraught with terrible danger. I may be sending you to your death. No, I will go myself and try to find it."

The eyes of the young chief flashed fire.

"My brother forgets!" he exclaimed. "What will my life be worth to me if another brave wins Willow Blossom and becomes the chief of the Cheyenne nation?"

"Very well, then, I will tell you; but only on condition that I accompany you to the neighborhood of the camp of the Dakotas. You can go in alone and try to seize the war drum; but I must be there so that if you are captured I can plan some scheme for your rescue, or if you are killed I can avenge you."

"Agreed," said Lone Bear.

"Then listen. The sacred war drum is hidden in a cave near the base of Coyote Mountain. In this cave the Dakotas bury their great chiefs and medicine men and keep all their tribal treasures.

"It is supposed to be haunted by the spirits of the dead, and on that account it is not often visited by the Dakotas. Only the medicine men go there, as a rule—except on some great occasion, like the burial of a chief.

"But there is danger now, because the scouts report that the Dakotas are assembling at the foot of Coyote Mountain, which is one of their principal strongholds. You may have to penetrate right through their camp before you can get to the cave."

"I care nothing for the risk," declared Lone Bear, his dark face alive with eager excitement. The prospect of such an adventure as Cody held out to him had startled him out of his usual calm dignity.

"Do you know the country around Coyote Mountain?" the border king asked.

"Yes, I have hunted there," the young chief replied.

"Then here is a plan which will show you the location of the cave, as well as I can remember it from the description given to me by the old Dakota."

He drew from his pocket a pencil and paper, and rapidly sketched a plan.

The Cheyenne comprehended it in a moment, for he was a man of quick intelligence.

"We will start at once," he declared. "I will give orders that no movement is to be made against the Dakotas until we return. All our braves can remain in the camp and exercise themselves with warlike sports until they hear from us.

"It is not likely that the Dakotas will attack them, and if they do it will be easy enough to beat them off. I will leave Red Tomahawk in command of the Bear Cheyennes, and Willow Blossom, of course, in command of her own people. We shall not be needed."

Buffalo Bill agreed to this, but when the two blood brothers started to make the preparations for their journey, they found that it was not easy to get away from the camp without disclosing the purpose they had in mind.

Lone Bear did not want to do this, because he feared that some of the other braves who were anxious to win the hand of Willow Blossom might try to forestall him.

Red Tomahawk urged him to take a party of braves with him, and Wild Bill and Nick Wharton were very anxious to go with Cody, declaring that he was having all the fun and they were being left out in the cold. But to take others with them might have spoiled their plans, for the job would have to be done with great secrecy if it was to succeed. Finally they managed to break away, and rode off together, leaving their friends in a very dissatisfied frame of mind.

Willow Blossom was especially discontented because she had failed to persuade either Buffalo Bill or Lone Bear to tell her where they were going.

As soon as they had departed, she called the two white scouts and Red Tomahawk into conference.

"What is to be done?" she asked. "I know they are running into great danger."

"It's easy enough to guess where they are going," Wild Bill remarked. "They have struck the trail for the Dakota camp. Goodness only knows what they are going to do there, but they have some big scheme in mind, and they are the men to carry it through, too."

"They will be captured and tortured to death," said Willow Blossom, breaking down and sobbing bitterly.

"Let us go after them at once, with a strong war party, so that we will be at hand to help them if danger threatens," Red Tomahawk suggested.

"But if we do that, we may spoil their scheme," Wild Bill objected. "Whatever it is, they want to carry it through alone. They evidently fear that if many men were with them they would not have a chance."

"That is true," Willow Blossom said, "but we cannot leave them alone. I will tell you what we will do. Tomorrow morning we will start upon their trail with a large war party and follow them straight to the Dakota camp, if it leads there. They will travel faster than we shall, so that they will have plenty of time to carry out their plans. If we find they have been captured, we may be able to rescue them. If not——"

The young chieftainess did not finish the sentence, but the fierce look in her eyes boded ill for the Dakotas.

Next morning the Cheyennes took the trail, more than two hundred braves strong, and they found, as they expected, that it led to the stronghold of the Dakotas.

* * * * *

Lone Bear and his paleface pard crested a rise in the prairie, three days later, and, lying hidden in the grass, took a careful survey of the country.

They had come into the country of the Dakotas, and they could see the smoke of the enemy's camp fires rising lazily into the cloudless air of the early morning.

The braves were preparing their breakfast.

They had pitched their camp at the foot of a lofty mountain, the first of a long range. It was a good position. They could see the approach of an enemy in plenty of time to retire to the mountains, where they had several strongholds that were almost impregnable.

It would be impossible to advance over the plain during the day without being seen, but Lone Bear did not want to waste time by waiting until nightfall.

Away to the east, he saw that the country was fairly well wooded. He decided that he would make a detour and try to get behind the camp that way and reach the cave.

Buffalo Bill, meanwhile, would remain behind the rise, hidden in a clump of timber with the horses. He longed to go with his blood brother, but the latter protested that if he did, the deed would be robbed of much of its glory.

It was with a heavy heart that the border king watched his friend depart, for he feared that he might have sent him to his death.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SACRED CAVE.

Lone Bear was an expert in the art of taking cover. He knew that many keen eyes in the Dakota camp must be on the watch, and he was therefore very cautious in creeping through the long grass to the timbered belt in which he would be comparatively safe.

He had left his rifle behind with Cody, as it would encumber his movements. He had a revolver in his belt, but he did not mean to use it, except in the last extremity, for it would bring too many of his foes down upon him. He would rather trust to the noiseless steel.

At last he reached the timber, apparently unseen by the enemy; and he rose to his feet and stepped boldly and briskly forward, securely sheltered by the thick vegetation.

The wood ran clear down to the side of the mountain, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile from the Dakota camp. If he could pass through it safely, he could lurk under cover of the broken ground around the base of the mountain until he found the cave.

As he advanced through the wood, he looked carefully from side to side, on the alert to detect the first sign of any opening in the ground that might lead to a cave, however carefully its entrance might be masked.

Suddenly, as he was stooping to push away some undergrowth that obstructed his path, he felt the wind of an arrow past his ear.

The shaft missed him by about a quarter of an inch, and stuck quivering in the ground.

Lone Bear turned, quick as a flash, and saw two fierce eyes gleaming at him from a mask of thick vegetation about thirty feet to the right. Only the eyes were visible to him, the rest of the face and the body being hidden by the density of the vegetation.

The eyes were so menacing and terrible in their expression that for a moment the young chieftain stared at them in fascination—too startled to move.

Another arrow, which came so close that he could feel the wind of it upon his cheek, quickly woke him to action.

He drew his scalping knife and sent it whizzing with terrible force toward the eyes.

There was a scream of pain as the eyes disappeared.

Lone Bear rushed forward hopefully, thinking that he had killed his enemy, or, at least, wounded him so badly that he would not be able to get away.

But in his haste he was not sufficiently cautious. His foot tripped in the tangled undergrowth, and he was thrown headlong to the ground.

He was up in a moment, but when he searched the spot where he had seen the eyes he could find no trace of the man who had attacked him.

The ground was hard and stony in that particular place, and had not received the light footprints of the Indian's moccasins.

There were a few spots of blood on some of the leaves and on the ground. Had it not been for these, and for the undeniable evidence of the arrows, the young chief would have almost persuaded himself that he was the victim of a delusion.

But it was plain enough that he had wounded his enemy, probably very slightly, and the man had fled.

Should he pursue him, he wondered, or should he press on and try to find the cave?

The enemy had a good start, and would increase it while he wasted time in picking up the trail.

"He will get away, whatever I do," Lone Bear muttered to himself, picking up the knife he had thrown at his hidden foe. "So much the more reason to push on and try to find the cave before he brings the rest of his

tribe down on me. It would take too much time to try to catch him in this thick wood."

The thought of giving up the enterprise and going back, now that the enemy would be warned of his presence, never once entered the head of the brave, young Cheyenne.

He had quite made up his mind to carry the adventure through successfully or perish in the attempt.

Pushing on rapidly, he soon emerged from the thick wood into a barren gully. Looking at the plan which Buffalo Bill had given him, he saw that he must be near the object of his quest.

He searched the sides of the gully carefully, for the old Dakota had said that the entrance to the cave was in such a place. At last, to the left, he saw a small hole—barely large enough for him to crawl through on his hands and knees.

It looked as if it was the lair of some wild beast, and for a moment he hardly dared to hope that he had really made the great discovery. But when he passed through the hole he saw that it led to a larger passage, and beyond it the shadowy dimness of a large cave was revealed to his eager gaze.

The sound of running water came to his ears, faint but distinct, from the depths of the cave. Evidently there was some subterranean stream running through it and emptying itself through some other opening.

Lone Bear hastened through the narrow passage, and then lighted a candle which Buffalo Bill had given him. He saw that the sides and roof of the cave were covered with huge stalactites, which gave it a weird and terrifying appearance in the dim light.

The Cheyenne chief was as brave as any of his race, but he had a fair share of the superstition common to all redskins. He thought now of the stories that the cave was haunted by the spirits of the dead Dakotas who were buried in it, and for a moment his lofty courage failed him.

Then he remembered the great prize he had at stake—Willow Blossom—and he went boldly forward.

The passage soon grew larger and broadened out until the feeble light cast by his candle could not reach to both sides of the wall of rock with which he was hemmed in.

Presently he came to a parting of the ways. The cavern branched off into two passages, both of vast extent, as far as he could see by the faint light at his command.

He hesitated which course to take—which cavern to search first.

As he stood there, unable to make up his mind, he happened to cast his eyes to the ground, and saw, just in front of him, the impression of a Dakota moccasin on a patch of soft, damp sand. It pointed in the direction of the cavern to the right.

Somebody had gone in there, and only a short time before, judging from the freshness of the footprint. Perhaps the man was still there.

No! Looking around carefully, the Cheyenne saw another footprint in the sand in the opposite direction. The man had not only gone into the cavern, but had returned from it.

The hard rock of the floor had not taken the impressions of his moccasins, but they were revealed by this little patch of telltale sand.

There was no longer any reason to doubt which of the two caves was the right one.

It was practically certain that the Dakota, who was in all probability a priest, had gone to visit the shrine at which the sacred war drum and all the other "war medicine" of his tribe was kept.

The ground was uneven and covered with boulders. In the dim light Lone Bear continually tripped and stumbled.

At last he fell headlong over a small rock, and found himself up to his neck in water.

He had fallen into a silent but swiftly flowing subterranean stream, and it was some few moments before he could struggle to his feet and wade to the other side against the force of the current.

Luckily the place on which he had stumbled was shallow. As he afterward found, if he had fallen in a little lower down he would have found himself in ten feet of water, and he might have drowned, for, like most of the Indians of the plains, he was of no account as a swimmer.

As it was, he had soaked his revolver and cartridge belt, and it was pretty certain that the weapon would be of no use to him if it came to a fight with the Dakotas.

It was not long before he had good cause to regret this misfortune most sincerely.

He had held on to the candle in his struggle with the stream. Luckily his matches, being in a water-tight box, had remained dry. He lit the candle again, and went on his way, more cautiously than before.

About a hundred yards further on he came into a large, circular hall with a domelike roof. It might have been hollowed out by human hands, so regular and symmetrical were its proportions.

Directly in the center of this hall there was a large, raised platform built of rocks and boulders.

The sight of that platform and what was upon it froze Lone Bear's blood with horror, and he had hard work to conquer his desire to turn on his heel and fly from the spot like a coward.

Standing erect and confronting him were a number of skeletons—all that remained of the great chiefs and priests of the Dakotas who had found sepulture in that gloomy cavern.

They held their bony fingers toward him in an attitude of menace, as if demanding to know why he—the enemy of their nation—dared to profane their last resting place.

In their outstretched hands they gripped tomahawks and scalping knives—the weapons they had wielded with deadly effect in their lifetime, and which had been buried with them for their use in the happy hunting grounds of the Great Manitou.

Lone Bear stared at these grim relics of mortality with an ever-growing fear gripping at his heart. It is impossible to tell how long he would have stood riveted to the spot by his superstitious terrors.

But suddenly he heard a sound which sent the red blood tingling through his body, and made him a man and a warrior again.

From far back in the recesses of the cave through which he had journeyed there came a faint cry—the call of one Dakota to another.

It was answered by several voices, and Lone Bear knew that he would soon have human foes to deal with.

He had no fear of them, though he had been appalled by the nameless terrors of the grave.

But before he turned to face or dodge his foes, he

must carry out his mission. He must get the sacred war drum.

An instinct told him that it was on the platform, and that the crafty Dakota priests had arranged the skeletons in their terrifying pose in order to frighten any intruders who might by chance penetrate to their holy of holies.

Like all redskins, he was terrified at the idea of committing sacrilege, but there was no help for it. He would not hesitate now, with success almost within his grasp.

Holding the candle high above his head, so that its feeble beams would illumine the largest possible area of ground, he advanced with firm step but quaking heart to the foot of the platform.

It was as he had expected.

In the very center of the platform, on a small pedestal formed of grinning human skulls, there rested the sacred war drum of the Dakotas.

With a low cry of triumph, Lone Bear seized it in his right hand and examined it eagerly.

As he did so, the entrance to the hall in which he stood was suddenly brilliantly illumined by the light of many torches, and a frightful war whoop of mingled anger and triumph rang loudly in his ears.

CHAPTER XI.

LONE BEAR'S STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

Even in that moment of acute peril, Lone Bear was cool enough to examine the war drum the instant before he blew out the candle which showed his position to the Dakotas.

It was made of human skin stretched tightly upon a framework of animals' bones, and was hideously decorated with human scalps and with the teeth of the grizzly bear and other animals. These adornments, as well as the place in which he had found it, convinced Lone Bear that he had found the real drum.

But how to get away with it, and dodge the penalty of his daring act?

The Dakotas were already swarming in through the passage into the hall. Their torches had not yet fully illumined the vast chamber, but they had seen him by the light of his own candle, and were rushing forward, intent on punishing him for defiling the sepulcher of their famous dead.

Lone Bear promptly blew out the candle, and then silently changed his position, keeping tight hold of the war drum, which he slung round his neck by a string which was attached to it, so as to leave his arms free for the fight which seemed inevitable.

He crept forward swiftly but silently toward the passage, making a detour so that he would avoid the men who were rushing toward him.

Fortunately the light of their torches did not carry far, and in the gloom of the cavern they could not see him.

They reached the platform of the dead, and seemed surprised to find that he had vanished.

Lone Bear turned for a moment to gaze at them, and he saw that his foes numbered thirteen. One of them was a medicine man, and others were his assistants, but there were also several warriors.

They presented a strange and awe-inspiring picture,

had Lone Bear been the man to be impressed by such a scene, which he was not.

They had halted, in momentary indecision, not more than a hundred yards away from the point where he was standing.

Their blazing torches revealed their tall feather head-dresses and their dark, naked bodies, which were frightfully painted with the gaudy colors of the war council and the medicine lodge.

The light shone on the steel of their tomahawks and rifles, for they were well armed. Worse than that—it showed up the skeletons standing erect upon the platform with terrible distinctness.

Lone Bear shuddered as he saw them again, and he felt that they were threatening him with nameless tortures for having dared to plunder their shrine.

Some of the Dakotas were also nervous of that grim and ghostly place, for Lone Bear could hear the warriors begging the medicine men to return. The latter, of course, cared nothing for the sight of the skeletons, for they were used to them.

"The light is gone," said one of the braves, loudly, but in a voice that shook with terror. He seemed to be speaking in order to keep his courage up. "The Cheyenne must have fallen a prey to the devils of this place. They carried him off to their home in the bowels of the earth at the very moment when he sought to take the sacred drum."

"Fool!" answered one of the medicine men, who seemed to be the chief over the rest. "The drum is gone, and the Cheyenne is somewhere here. He can't be far away. He must be lurking in the shadows of the cave. Search thoroughly!"

The man spoke in a tone of unusual ferocity and power, and Lone Bear recognized in a flash that here was the foe he had most reason to fear. He was not scared by the supposed ghostly terrors of the place, and he was filled with a relentless determination to find the intruder.

Fortunately for the young Cheyenne, the Dakotas did not scatter to find him. Whether because of their superstitious fears, or because they preferred not to stumble on a desperate man alone in the dark, they kept together.

He started at once to edge his way noiselessly toward the passage by which he had entered. There was no light to guide his steps, and, groping his way by the sense of touch, he had to go slowly lest he should stumble again over a rock and make a noise which would disclose his position to the enemy. The intense gloom was very confusing, and he had to look round constantly to see where he was.

The Dakotas, as he saw to his infinite relief, had gone forward to search the other end of the vast hall. They had naturally imagined that when he heard their war cry he would flee away from them as far as he could go, instead of dodging toward them in order to try to reach the passage by which he had entered.

But soon they discovered their mistake, and turned to retrace their steps, yelling loudly in their anger and disappointment. Their torches drew rapidly nearer and nearer.

Lone Bear had been feeling his way along the side of the hall by touching the rocky wall, but he began to fear that he must have passed the entrance, so long was he coming to it.

Then, at last, he felt a slight current of air in his face, and he knew that it must come from the passage, for the atmosphere in the domed hall was still and close.

Next moment his hand, which had been touching the wall, went into space. He had found the entrance, and had at least a chance for his life, although a mighty poor one.

But just as he was rejoicing over his luck, his foot slipped and he went crashing down on the rocky floor with a noise that sounded all through the domed chamber. His fall sent two or three big stones rolling, and they had hardly stopped before the loud yells of the Dakotas showed that they had not been slow to perceive his exact position.

The torches came forward now far more quickly than before, and, as he rose from the ground, aching with the pain of his heavy fall, Lone Bear saw that there was nothing for it now but a trial of speed.

Yet the ground was so bad that for a time he could not go fast. Then it improved, and he was able to break into a run. The path was now level and straight, for he had not yet come to the subterranean river.

What worried him most of all was that, after a few minutes, he neither heard nor saw anything of his foes. Their torches no longer flickered in the darkness, and their yells no longer smote upon his ears.

What had become of them? It was absurd to suppose that they had given up the chase. Lone Bear knew the nature of the Dakotas far too well to believe that for a moment.

Perhaps they had extinguished their torches and were creeping on him silently through the darkness, hoping to attack him by surprise and kill or capture him without giving him a chance to slaughter any of them.

Or perhaps they had turned off into some secret passage parallel with the one through which he was flying, and would get ahead of him and spring out upon him suddenly before he could win his way to the blessed light of day.

He stopped, as this thought struck him, and hesitated for a moment.

Should he go back to the hall of death and try to find some other exit from the mammoth cave?

No! a thousand times, no!

The young Cheyenne felt that he would rather face his living foes at any disadvantage than return to those menacing skeletons.

He knew that he had little hope of eluding his pursuers without a fight, but the horrors of the cavern had so settled on his mind that he was determined to try to gain the open air at any cost rather than go back.

Suddenly he saw a little flicker of light on the rocky floor directly in front of him.

It must be his foes, waiting for him, with a torch sheltered by their hands.

They were only a few feet away, behind a jutting rock.

His idea that they had sought another and a swifter passage must have been correct.

He halted instantly, but as he did so the head medicine man whom he had seen in the cave of skeletons stepped from behind the rock, holding the torch in one hand and carefully shading it with the other.

Evidently he wanted to find out where the Cheyenne was, for he must have been wondering why he had been so long in coming through the passage.

He caught sight of Lone Bear instantly, and with a savage snarl leaped toward him, thrusting forward the torch as if he would thrust it in his face and blind him with the flame.

With a quick jump the young Cheyenne eluded the fearful weapon.

As he did so, he whipped out his revolver from his belt, forgetting for the moment that the cartridges had been soaked in the subterranean river.

The hammer fell with a click, and he knew that the weapon was useless.

So did the Dakota priest.

Yelling with savage delight, he again rushed forward, brandishing the torch above his head.

But Lone Bear, without a second's delay, hurled the heavy revolver in his face with stunning force.

The man reeled back, groaning, and put his hands to his face.

The young chief sprang at him, tomahawk in hand, intending to brain him before he died. For it seemed that die he must. A dozen other medicine men and braves had followed their leader from behind the rock and were now swarming up to attack him.

Lone Bear aimed a blow at the chief priest's head, but that worthy had only taken a second or two to recover from the stunning shock of the revolver.

Quick as a snake to dodge, he ducked his head, and the tomahawk fell upon the forehead of one of his companions who was rushing to his aid.

The fellow fell to the ground, screaming in his death agony; and his fall checked the rest for an instant.

Lone Bear was quick to take advantage of their pause.

He dashed through them, slashing right and left with his tomahawk, and hardly noticing in his hurry whether or not his blows took effect.

In a few moments he was free of the crowd and racing onward toward the little tunnel which led to the open air.

The Dakotas—those of them who had survived the furious fight—gave chase, yelling like fiends robbed of their prey.

Lone Bear had not escaped from that terrible *mêlée* unscathed.

One of the braves had struck him a severe blow on the shoulder with the butt end of his rifle, and a medicine man had stabbed him in the side with a knife just as he was getting free of the crowd.

Blood was flowing freely from this wound, and it pained him more and more as he ran, until he soon grew dizzy and sick, and swayed weakly from side to side.

His strength was rapidly failing, and it seemed certain that he must fall into the hands of his bloodthirsty foes.

Stumbling with every footstep, he still pushed gallantly onward, until at last he tripped over a rock and was sent to the ground like a stone from a sling.

He lay there for a few moments unconscious.

Then he opened his eyes and looked round feebly.

He was lying flat on the rock, with his hands stretched out in front of him.

They touched nothing, and when he groped with them he could find nothing but space.

A cold sweat of horror broke out all over his body. Brave man though he was, he shuddered and nearly relapsed into unconsciousness.

He was lying on the very brink of a terrible chasm, which opened in the rocky floor of the cave.

His lucky fall had alone saved him from stumbling over its brink and being hurled down into fathomless depths.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS.

Lone Bear's position now seemed to be utterly hopeless. Behind him were his bloodthirsty and merciless foes; in front, the yawning precipice.

He could hear the voices of the Dakotas as they hastened toward him through the gloom.

They had followed him slowly and cautiously, for they were sure of catching him. As a matter of fact, several of their comrades were on guard outside the cave, at the mouth of the entrance tunnel; and Lone Bear would surely have been struck down and captured as he emerged if he had managed to gain his goal.

The young Cheyenne looked around eagerly for some means of escape as their torches drew nearer; but he could find none, and he resigned himself with the fortitude of an Indian chief to death. He had made up his mind that he would not be captured, and that, before he fell he would cast the sacred war drum of the Dakotas over the brink of the precipice.

Drawing back into the shadow of a large rock, he drew his knife—for he had lost his tomahawk in his fall—and nerved himself for his last fight.

He could see the Dakotas halt about forty feet away, cluster together in a bunch, and look around. They talked in high-pitched voices, nervously and excitedly, and seemed very much afraid to leave one another.

Lone Bear caught the voice of the chief medicine man, raised in anger. He was again telling them to scatter and search for the intruder, but they would not do so. They feared the chasm, which they supposed to be the habitation of evil spirits, and they had seen enough of the prowess of their enemy to be afraid of meeting him alone.

The medicine man advanced alone toward the edge of the abyss. His eyes flashed cruelly, like those of an angry snake. He guessed pretty well where his enemy was, and he was determined that he should not escape him again.

His head was singing from the blow in the face he had received from Lone Bear's revolver, and he yearned for revenge. Besides this, he knew that unless he could recover the sacred war drum and punish the daring enemy who had tried to steal it, his power among his people would be at an end.

It only needed a glance into his baleful eyes, gleaming brightly in the light of the torch which he carried in his left hand, to read his fixed resolve to grapple with his foe and slay him.

Lone Bear waited, without hope and without fear, for the inevitable struggle.

He had resolved, for his part, that he would carry the medicine man, close-locked in his embrace, over the edge of the precipice, so that they would go down to death together. He had no hope that, weak as he was, he could vanquish him and then escape from the other Indians.

For a few moments the fierce priest did not see him, and they were moments that seemed like weeks to the waiting man.

He walked up and down the edge of the precipice, at a

distance of about thirty yards from Lone Bear, and then turned and was about to go back to his comrades, having apparently decided in his own mind that the fugitive had fallen into the abyss in the haste of his flight.

But as he turned, raising the torch aloft for a last look around, his eyes fell upon the figure of the Cheyenne crouching, knife in hand, in the shadow of the rock.

In an instant he whipped out his own knife, threw down the torch and ran toward his foe.

They came together on the very edge of the chasm and fought their wild duel, each man knowing that a single false step would prove his doom, and that the one who staggered from a wound would go reeling down to a terrible death.

Lone Bear was faint with loss of blood and the numerous injuries he had received in his long-drawn-out struggle for life, but he braced himself up for the fight with all the courage of his indomitable nature. He had been waiting for it, and he received the onset of the Dakota with a deadly coolness.

But the medicine man, maddened by his fanatical hate, showed little caution and paid the natural penalty.

He rushed at Lone Bear with the blind rage of a bull and made two vicious stabs at him with his knife, both of which the lithe, young Cheyenne dodged easily.

Then, just as the second blow was struck, Lone Bear saw his chance. With a quick, sure thrust he buried his knife up to the hilt in the body of the priest.

Still he was not out of peril.

The medicine man gave a terrible groan as he felt the steel. Even Lone Bear, trained to bloody deeds though he was, could hardly repress a shudder when it smote upon his ear.

Swaying like a drunken man, the Dakota fought back the wave of death that he felt surging over him, and staggered forward, trying to come to hand-grips with his enemy and drag him down to death with him.

He clasped Lone Bear in his arms with the terrible clutch of a dying man and slowly dragged him, inch by inch, toward the brink.

Weakened as he was, the Cheyenne struggled vainly; but when he was only a couple of feet away from his impending doom he managed to wrench his right arm free and deal his terrible foe two swift stabs straight to the heart.

That death grip was relaxed at once, but as he fell over the edge the medicine man tore away the sacred war drum which was hanging by a thin string over Lone Bear's shoulders.

It went down with him into the bottomless pit in which he expiated the many deeds of blood and horror which he had done in the service of his false gods.

As he fell into the spirit-haunted depths a cry came from his lips so weird and unearthly that it seemed it must have been uttered by one of the demons supposed by the Indians to dwell there.

That, at all events, was the opinion of the other Dakotas.

Lone Bear turned to face them, knife in hand, expecting that he would soon follow the man he had slain.

In the fitful gleam of the torches, stained from head to foot with blood and with his face ghastly and haggard from the strain of the terrible experiences he had gone through, it was hardly strange that the superstitious redskins took him for his own ghost.

They thought he had been slain by the demons of the

pit and had reappeared again to kill them. His marvelous escape in the duel with the medicine man, which they had witnessed, seemed more than mortal.

For a moment they gazed at him in terrified hesitation.

Then, as he uttered the war cry of the Cheyennes in a high-pitched, unearthly screech and took a step toward them, their overstrained nerves broke down completely.

They were brave enough warriors under ordinary circumstances, no doubt, but the terrors of that spirit-haunted cave were too much for them.

They gave a yell of fear and horror, and then turned tail and fled into the darkness, never once stopping to cast a glance behind them.

Mad with the lust of blood—the dominant passion of the savage redskin nature—Lone Bear tried to pursue them. After all he had passed through, he seemed to have lost the desire of life, as he had certainly lost the fear of death.

But he soon found that he was too weak to take many steps. He sank down upon the rocks, bleeding freely, and fainted.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SUBTERRANEAN RIVER.

How long he lay there Lone Bear could not tell, but it must have been for several hours.

The Indians, frightened nearly out of their skins, did not come back to trouble him.

Indeed, as Lone Bear found out later, all the braves of the Dakotas gave the sacred cave a very wide berth for several months afterward. Only a few medicine men entered it, in fear and trembling, to see if they could discover any trace of the sacred drum.

They found a fragment of the broken string on the brink of the precipice, and rightly guessed that the drum itself had gone down into the abyss and was lost to them forever. Mourning bitterly, they returned to their people and imparted the sad news, with the result that the warlike spirit of the braves was greatly weakened, for they thought their luck as a nation had vanished with the loss of their much-prized talisman.

This had a very important effect later, but we must now return to Lone Bear.

As he returned to his senses he became aware that he had had a remarkably narrow escape of bleeding to death.

His deerskin jacket and breeches were caked with blood. It had already dried, thus showing how long he must have lain unconscious.

Luckily, the wounds had stopped bleeding of their own accord, although the stab in his side still gave him a good deal of pain.

When he rose to his feet, he felt weak, but much better than he had been before his fight with the medicine man.

His head was clear and his brain active.

The desire for life—life with Willow Blossom—had returned, and he thought hard how he could best escape from his still perilous position.

He did not fear that the Dakotas would return, but he believed they would leave a guard at the tunnel by which he had entered the cave, so that they could slay him when he emerged, if by any chance he should happen to be still alive.

It followed that he must find some other way out. But was there another way?

Suddenly he remembered the subterranean river, in which he had so narrowly escaped drowning.

That river must flow somewhere. Perhaps it went down into the bowels of the earth; perhaps it emerged into the open country not far away. Could he not float down on its swift current to safety? It was a desperate chance, but it seemed to him better than trying to escape by the way he had come, with the almost certain chance of falling into the hands of the Dakotas.

He picked up the torch which the dead medicine man had flung down when he advanced to attack him and relighted it. Then he made his way, slowly and cautiously, to the river. He took good care not to risk falling into any more chasms, and he searched all around the vast cave for another way out. This consumed an hour or so, and at the end of that time he was forced to conclude that there was none. He had to take his choice between the tunnel and the river.

He walked up and down the brink of the stream for some time, examining it carefully. He saw that the bed was broad and deep, with apparently very few turns and obstructions. The place into which he had fallen some hours before was the shallowest part of the stream.

How was he to float down? He could hardly swim three strokes, and he had all a non-swimmer's terror of the water, especially of a stream that looked so black and cruel as this subterranean river to which no ray of sunlight ever penetrated.

Lone Bear decided that he must have something to float upon, or he would surely be drowned.

He made another long search, and at last nerved himself up to face once more the grim skeletons of the hall of death.

There he found that which he sought.

The skeletons were attached to a strong and heavy board base, made of a number of planks tied together with strips of rawhide.

It was some minutes before Lone Bear could summon up his courage to tear the skeletons away from their support, but it had to be done, and at last he did it.

The framework was too heavy for him to carry to the side of the stream, so he cut the lashings apart and carried the planks thither one by one.

When he had four of them he bound them together again firmly, and thus had an excellent raft.

With hope once more surging in his heart, he pushed it into the stream, jumped aboard, lay down flat on his stomach and drifted swiftly onward—whither he could not tell.

He had done all he could, and it rested with the Great Manitou whether he would ever be permitted to see the blessed light of day again.

The current grew swifter and swifter, and it soon became evident that the river was running down a steep incline.

Would it end in a terrible cataract, in an awful fall in which he would be strangled and pounded to death?

Suddenly he saw, far ahead of him, a tiny ray of light.

It was the open sunshine—the sunshine of early morning, soon after the dawn, for he had been occupied all night in the cave.

Would he reach it in safety, or would he be killed by some unknown peril before he could emerge from that terrible cave?

Nearer and nearer the light came, and he was just beginning to congratulate himself that he was saved, when his frail craft struck a hidden snag and was smashed instantly to pieces.

Lone Bear struggled in the swift current for a few moments, and then he was thrown with great force against the side of the rock. His head struck it, and he lost consciousness.

He was swirled rapidly down the stream and tossed up like a cork on the bank, about fifty yards from the spot where the subterranean river emerged into the open country.

Unfortunately this spot was very near to the camp of the Dakotas, and a few minutes later one of their braves caught sight of the unconscious form and hastened toward it.

He saw that it was the body of a Cheyenne warrior, and to his great joy found that he was still living.

Whooping with delight, he summoned several of his comrades, and it was not long before Lone Bear was carried, bound hand and foot, into the Dakota camp—a victim reserved for the torture of the stake!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BORDER KING'S SACRIFICE.

Buffalo Bill waited all day and all night for his Cheyenne comrade, while these exciting events had been happening in the sacred cave, and he was a prey to the most acute anxiety.

Again and again he reproached himself for having told Lone Bear about the war drum, and sent him on a mission which might well prove to be his death. Still more bitterly he regretted that he had not overridden the Cheyenne's objections and insisted on going with him into the cave.

When the dawn came he could wait for the return of his friend no longer. Leaving the horses tethered in the wood, he crept slowly and cautiously toward the Dakota camp. If Lone Bear was still alive he expected to find him there—a prisoner.

The border king reached a low hillock—one of the foothills of the range which began with Coyote Mountain—without being seen. It looked directly down upon the Indian camp, about three hundred yards away. Hiding himself behind some tangled brushwood, he peered down on the redskins busy among their tents below.

It had taken him nearly two hours to gain this spot without being seen. In the meantime, Lone Bear had come through the subterranean river and been captured.

Buffalo Bill watched the camp for nearly an hour, but saw nothing of his friend. As a matter of fact, Lone Bear had been taken to a tepee to be revived from his unconsciousness before he was led out to the torture.

Presently, the king of the scouts saw several of the bucks busily employed in driving a stake into the ground. He knew it only too well. It was the stake of the fiery torment, and a cold fear gripped his heart that his blood brother might be the destined victim.

It was not long before they finished their task, and then a crowd of braves began to gather around the stake, which had been erected on the outskirts of the camp, on the open prairie.

Their eager cries showed that they were impatient for the cruel spectacle which they loved so well to begin.

Soon a bound figure was led out of a tepee and marched toward the stake by several of the medicine men.

Even at that distance, the border king recognized the figure as that of his blood brother, Lone Bear—the man whom he had sworn by the solemn oath of blood to protect, and, if need were, to die for—the man who was now going to his death indirectly through his, Cody's, means.

"I ought never to have sent him on such a mission," groaned the border king, forgetting in his generous self-reproach that Lone Bear had been eager to go and that he had tried to hold him back. "Well, there is still time. I reckon the Dakotas would rather have me to work their tricks on even than him."

Without a moment's hesitation, he rose from the bushes behind which he was hidden and rapidly descended the hillock, running toward the crowd of Indians who were gathered near the stake.

He had made up his mind to offer his own life in exchange for that of his blood brother.

He knew that the Dakotas feared and hated him as they feared and hated no other man—not even the chief of the Bear Cheyennes—not even the intruder who had broken into their sacred cave, stolen their war drum and slain their high priest.

The border king had inflicted bitter losses on the tribe again and again, and they would have cheerfully sacrificed two score braves to get him into their power.

The redskins were so intent upon watching the prisoner, to see whether he showed any traces of fear, that Buffalo Bill was able to get quite close to them before he was seen.

Suddenly a brave, happening to turn round, perceived him and pointed his finger at him, yelling in his surprise.

The Dakotas were astounded. They looked at him as if he had dropped from the skies.

The Cheyenne chief, White Wolf, who was in their midst with his braves, was the first to recover from his amazement.

When he recognized Cody as his old enemy he shrieked with fury, drew a scalping knife from his belt and rushed toward him.

A Dakota, whose fine headdress of eagle feathers showed that he was the paramount chief of the tribe, grappled with him and pushed him back.

He saw that the border king had a six-shooter in each hand, and he wanted to hear what he had to say before the fighting began. He, too, had recognized the redoubtable Long Hair; and he had a shrewd suspicion what was the nature of the mission that had brought him so boldly into the camp.

Addressing himself to this Dakota chieftain, the knight of the plains said, courteously:

"Greeting, Iron Fist! You and I have never met, save on the field of battle, but we know one another pretty well, I think. Here, you see, I have two revolvers. You know enough about me to be sure that I carry a life in every bullet. The last bullet will be for myself—the last but one for the prisoner there. Will you listen quietly to what I have to say, or must I begin to fire?"

"Speak, Long Hair! We listen. None shall harm you until I declare this truce at an end."

White Wolf gnashed his teeth with rage when he heard

this, but at a sign from their chief two of the Dakotas had ranged themselves alongside of him, and by main force they restrained him from attempting another attack.

"Is it not true that you would give much to have me as a prisoner in your power, so that you could bind me to the stake and work your will on me?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Long Hair knows it is true," replied the Dakota chief, with savage emphasis upon his words. "There is no other man who has done so much harm to the Dakotas as Long Hair."

"Well, Iron Fist, will you give me the life of that prisoner if I give you mine—if I throw down my guns and surrender myself as a prisoner into your hands?"

Iron Fist had been expecting this offer, but when it came he was almost stunned by its splendid generosity and self-sacrifice. Savage though he was, he could appreciate nobility even in his foes.

"Long Hair," he said, slowly, as a murmur of admiration arose from the circle of Indians, "you are the noblest man I ever met. There is no man among the Dakotas—no, nor among any other Indian tribe—who would do this."

"Do you accept the offer?"

"Yes."

"What surety have I that you will let the prisoner go?"

"The tongue of Iron Fist is not crooked," said the Indian, proudly. "I have spoken, and my words are not forked. I will swear it by the bones of my fathers, by my hope to ride in the happy hunting grounds of the Great Manitou."

Buffalo Bill knew that the chief had a high reputation for being a man of his word, and he decided to accept his oath. He threw his revolvers to the ground and submitted to have his arms bound by the Dakotas.

All this time Lone Bear was not idle or silent. He protested again and again that he would not accept the sacrifice which his blood brother offered to make for him; but the matter did not rest within his power to decide.

By the order of Iron Fist, three of the braves gagged him and then carried him back to the tepee, from which he had just been brought. After the sacrifice had been accomplished he would be set at liberty.

The border king was speedily bound to the stake. Much as the Dakotas admired his conduct, they did not intend to be balked of their vengeance. On the contrary, they would subject him to the worst tortures their savage minds could conceive. They yearned for the satisfaction of wringing at least one groan from a man of such splendid courage.

Iron Fist commanded that four small fires of logs and brushwood should be built at four corners of a square, each about ten feet away from the stake to which the victim had been bound.

He meant that the border king should roast in the tortures of a slow fire before the torch was put to the fuel piled up beneath his feet.

The fires were built and lighted, and soon they were blazing fiercely.

Buffalo Bill nerved up his courage to endure this fiery trial. He was determined that he would not give the savages the pleasure of forcing a single groan from his lips. If he must die he would at least die like a true American, without whining.

The flames of the four fires, burning so close to him,

scorched his clothes and singed his hair and mustache. The heat was terrible, and he almost swooned away. But not a sound did he utter.

Maddened by the stern fortitude of Buffalo Bill, the chief of the Dakotas stepped forward to apply the torch to the sticks beneath his feet. But before he could light the fire he fell back, with a bullet through his brain.

The Dakotas yelled with rage and wonder when they saw the sudden death of their chieftain, who expired almost before he touched the ground.

They had little time for surprise, however.

With an ear-splitting yell, the war host of the Cheyennes, led by Red Tomahawk and Willow Blossom in person, were upon them.

They had been able to creep up easily without being detected, favored by the clouds of smoke that rolled out from the four fires, and also by the fact that the Dakotas were too much absorbed by their devilish task to keep a proper lookout.

The battle that followed was short but decisive.

The Dakotas and White Wolf's Cheyennes were only armed with their knives and tomahawks, and some were not armed at all, for they had not anticipated danger.

Taken by surprise, they were hewn down like sheep by their foes, who, seeing how they were treating their beloved Long Hair, had no thought of mercy.

Only a few of the Dakotas managed to escape to the mountains.

Wild Bill and Nick Wharton were among the first to burst into the fray. It was a shot from Wild Bill's rifle that had slain Iron Fist when he was about to put the flaming brand to the sticks beneath Cody's feet.

The two scouts cared nothing at the moment for vengeance on the Dakotas. Their first thought was to rescue Cody from his dangerous and torturing position.

They rushed up and scattered the four fires. Then they cut Buffalo Bill loose and rolled him in the grass, in order to extinguish the fire on his clothes, which had been ignited by some of the flying sparks.

The Cheyennes swept past them, as they were busy with this task, and massacred the Dakotas. But there was one man who saw what they were doing, and determined in his heart that the border king should yet die.

That man was the recreant Cheyenne chief, White Wolf.

He darted forward, knife in hand, caring nothing for his own life if he could only plunge the weapon up to the hilt in the heart of the knight of the plains.

Nick Wharton saw him coming, and received him with a couple of shots from his revolver, which stretched him dead on the grass.

Little more remains to be told.

Lone Bear was released from his captivity, safe and sound, but still suffering from the wounds he had received in the sacred cave.

Willow Blossom nursed him back to health and strength, and when he was fully recovered held a council of the Cheyenne nation to decide to whom she should give her hand in marriage in accordance with the terms of her promise.

It was the unanimous opinion of the braves that Lone Bear's adventure in the sacred cave was the most heroic

act of the campaign, save only Buffalo Bill's offer to take his place at the stake of sacrifice.

As Willow Blossom's offer did not include the white men, Lone Bear won the prize, much to the joy of the chieftainess herself.

She hesitated for a moment before she gave herself to him, for she remembered that in a rash moment, after hearing the story told by Plumed Heron, she had said that she would wed the man who slew White Wolf.

Being in all things the soul of honor, she reminded old Nick Wharton of this, and offered to marry him if he wished.

The bashful old trapper was nearly scared to death at the mere suggestion. In a terrified voice he called on Buffalo Bill to get him out of his plight.

The border king explained, in his most solemn manner, that old Nick had already got five wives in various parts of the white man's country and his laws forbade his taking any more.

Wharton could never understand how it was that Willow Blossom turned away from him in so much indignation, but he was very grateful to his friend, Cody, for getting him out of his scrape.

Willow Blossom and Lone Bear were soon married, and they ruled the Cheyenne nation for many years.

The war with the Dakotas was not finished by the one fight under the shadow of Coyote Mountain. Reinforced by other men of their nation, the Dakotas kept up the campaign in the mountains for several weeks; but when they knew for certain that they had lost their war drum, they put down their constant succession of defeats to the wrath of the Great Manitou and begged for peace, which was granted to them after they had given hostages for their good behavior in the future.

The Cheyennes who had followed the fortunes of White Wolf came back to the nation and were received into it again by the wish of Willow Blossom. Some of the braves, especially Red Tomahawk, thought that they ought to be slain, but Lone Bear said:

"No Cheyenne is our foe. Down with the Dakotas when we meet them on the field of battle! But show mercy and love to our own kinsmen."

As for Buffalo Bill and his two comrades, they dwelt for some time in the lodges of the Cheyennes, where the border king was regarded as the hero of heroes. But the time came when they struck out on the trail again in search of new scenes and fresh adventures.

THE END.

One of the most remarkable adventures in the career of the border king is recounted in next week's story, "Buffalo Bill's Sioux Foes; or, The Noosing of Big Elk."

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